

Maintained Special Schools for Children with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs and their Work with Parents

Submitted by Joanne Elaine Day, to the University of Exeter as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education, June 2019.

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(Signature)

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a final flourish.

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Abstract

Children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs often do not attain the qualifications of their peers. This can have more negative long-term outcomes in terms of employment, involvement with the criminal justice system and mental health difficulties than their typically developing peers. Some of these children with a statement of special educational need or Education Health and Care Plan will attend special schools and a higher proportion of children in special schools for BESD/SEMH receive free school meals (as an indicator of social disadvantage) than any other group of children in special schools. Studies indicate that families with lower socio-economic status are less likely to work with schools than families with higher socio-economic status. However, research seems to show that when schools work with parents this improves academic and social outcomes of children. This study aims to explore how maintained special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents. The project was implemented using a mixed-methods approach in two phases. The first phase was an internet-based survey sent to local authority maintained special schools providing for children with in England. In response to the survey, and for the second phase, staff and parents from six schools were interviewed. The results indicate the importance of commitment from the school leadership team to working with parents, and the development of a culture and practices within schools that helps overcome the barriers to schools and parents working together. This was evidenced through working in ways that show respect for parents' individual situations. This can include staff adapting their practices to work with parents, meeting parents' communication needs and transport needs, while helping parents to work with other organisations.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on how maintained special schools for children, aged 11-16 years, with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs work with the children's parents. The research took place in two phases, the first involved an internet-based survey for staff in special schools providing for children aged 11-16 years where the school had more than five percent of children with a primary special educational need of Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) from Department for Education data (DfE, 2014c). The second phase comprised of interviews with staff and parents from six of the schools that responded to the internet-based survey.

This chapter will consider the policy rationale for the research considering evidence around the links between low socio-economic status and children with BESD/SEMH and on the probability that parents will work with schools. This will be followed by a discussion of why this research is important in the context of other research in the area of working with parents. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the terms SEBD/SEMH, with a more detailed explanation to follow in the literature review. Then there is a discussion of the types of educational provision that children with statements of special educational need or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for BESD/SEMH may attend. The researcher's personal rationale for pursuing this area of research will follow. Finally, there will be a guide to the structure of the thesis.

Policy rationale

The importance of schools and parents working together is recognised by (Ofsted, 2011).:

'In the best cases seen, joint working between the home and the school led to much better outcomes for pupils; in particular, this helped pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities'(p5)

Bæck (2010) showed that teachers held a similar view of the importance of the involvement of parents in education and equally that many wanted parents to be more involved in their children's education. Within this thesis the term parent will be used to refer to anyone who has parental responsibility for the child (Goodall, 2018a) meaning a parent, foster parent, grandparent or other adult who takes responsibility for the child. How schools work together with parents can take many forms (Carnie, 2011) and is considered to be determined by how power is distributed between the school and parents. Arnstein (1969) describes how participation can simply be a manipulation of the parent by the school to appear to show involvement or can be the devolvement of power to the parent where they take a leadership role in the school and have the power to direct changes within the school. Much of the work that schools undertake with parents does not lie at these two extremes but in the middle with, for example, parents participating in meetings to discuss children's progress (Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996), volunteering with fundraising or in classrooms (Lyken-Segosebe and Hinz, 2015), or working with children to enhance their learning (Harris et al., 2015).

Given the suggested advantages that schools and parents working together provide it could be expected that all schools would implement ways to work with parents. However, as Ofsted (2011) indicates school are at different stages of implementing working with parents and overcoming the barriers that parents and schools need to surmount to work together. Some schools perceive that there are parents who are difficult for the school to work with (Harris and Goodall, 2008); however a different interpretation is that schools may not be reaching out to the parents in ways that are accessible (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Schools need to implement ways to work all parents. A greater examination of the benefits of schools and parents working together and the barriers to school and parents working together is explored in the literature review.

Research rationale

There is little research into the area of how special schools for children aged 11-16 years with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents. Hill and Taylor (2004)

suggest that most of the literature on parental involvement is conducted in elementary or primary schools. The Education Research Complete database was used to find articles which discuss how special schools for pupils aged 11-16 work for children who have special needs categorised as SEBD or SEMH or BESD¹. Only two articles were identified as partially meeting the search criteria of special schools for children with BESD/SEMH for children aged 11-16 years: Leenders et al. (2018) and Redden et al. (2001). In their American study of 6,162 children, Redden et al. (2001) discuss the impact of continuing a Head Start programme, a project to support low income families with health and education services, aimed at supporting the families of pre-school children through to third grade. This was in comparison to a control group where families did not participate in the Head Start Programme, on the incidence of 'mental retardation', emotional disturbance and speech or language impairments. This study did not focus on secondary aged pupils although some of the children may have had special needs, nor did it focus how special schools work with parents. A Dutch study carried out by Leenders et al. (2018) compared the perceptions of parents of pupils attending 'at risk' mainstream primary schools in areas of low socio-economic status and special schools for children with learning difficulties who may have behavioural needs as well. This study was similar to that of Redden et al. (2001) as it did not include secondary age children. The other documents identified by the search all included the search terms in their abstract, however did not match the area of research interest of special schools for secondary pupils with BESD/SEMH working with parents.

As the number and range of articles initially found was very limited, the search for all future documents included a range of international literature, as opposed to focusing solely on English systems. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) suggest that there is a long history of the borrowing of educational systems from different

¹ The terms special school, parents and sebd or semh or ebd or besd or social emotional and mental health issues or social emotional and behavioural difficulties or emotional behavioural difficulties or behavioural emotional and social difficulties were used for the search strategy.

countries in educational policy. They describe this process of countries transferring the systems from other places as a complex process whereby educational practices can be borrowed and implemented or where they can be imposed, for example, after an invasion by an occupying force or government change. However, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) also note that educational processes are only part of life and that it is not wise to borrow a policy without a deeper understanding of the education system and the circumstances of the country from which they are being borrowed. A system that may work well in one country and have good results may not work well in another (Shields, 2013). This would imply that the research about the way schools in other countries work may not be applicable to schools in this country and therefore should not be included in this thesis. However, as there is very limited research in the area, using the research that does exist from other countries allows for reflection on the different practices that occur in the schools within this project. Florian (2007) describes how she has learned a great deal from working in an international context and using the international literature in this section has also added a breadth to the topic which would be missing otherwise.

Much of the research that is specifically interested in how parents work with schools is focused on particular projects and interventions. Many such interventions can be very small and may demand high levels of time from specialists. Alkahtani (2013), for example, describes a single-family case study where the researcher worked with a 'motivated educated mother' over five weeks with several hours work before the intervention started and daily discussions on the child's progress. Similarly Verduin et al. (2008) describe an intervention, working with both the mother, a single working parent, and the kindergarten staff, with a four year old boy to reduce his Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) symptoms, overall showing a success in managing the ODD symptoms, but, with the ADHD symptoms unaddressed at the point of the conclusion of that part of the work. Although these studies do not provide quantitative data about the effects of the intervention, they provide a detailed description of how the intervention works and the context which allows the reader to understand how appropriate these interventions would be in

their own circumstances (King and Horrocks, 2010). Verduin et al. (2008) provide additional detail about the progress of the programme. These details include the initial success of the programme and the perceived need for new strategies, further developments and eventually concerns about the future ability of the school to maintain the programme.

There are also large-scale projects which are aimed at working with parents such as the Triple P programme which is an Australian programme developed at the University of Queensland to give parents strategies to build relationships with their children and help them to manage their behaviour. It has a wide range of target child groups. The research covers groups from preschool years (Özyurt et al., 2018) to adolescents with diabetes (Doherty et al., 2013). Doherty et al. (2013) were able to show a reduction in family conflict in the intervention group that completed the Triple P teenagers' workbook over 10 weeks compared to a 'care as usual' group which acted as a control group for the study. However, this research focusses on the impact of a specific programme that schools used to work with parents as opposed to considering the many different ways that schools can work with parents.

An examination by Delgado-Gaitan (1991) of how a Californian school supported its Spanish speaking pupils describes the range of ways that this school worked with parents. However, the school concerned was not a special school, and the majority of pupils did not have BESD/SEMH needs. This illustrates again that although there is research which is close to the area interest, there is an overall lack of research in the specific area of this thesis. This research study will aim to provide some evidence of how special schools for pupils aged 11 to 16 with Statements of Special Educational Needs (statements) or EHCPs work with parents.

Personal rationale

My interest in how special schools work with parents stems from my role as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at a special school for boys

with BESD/SEMH needs. I was SENCO during the change from statements to EHCPs, detailed in the SEN code of practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) and Children and Families Act (2014). Previously I have worked in mainstream schools and an independent special school for children with autism and/or challenging behaviour. Whilst working in these schools there was little emphasis on working with parents. As the SENCO for the school, at the time of commencing my research, I was responsible for the implementation of the changes from EHCPs to statements. I liaised with parents and carers more than at any other time in my career. I was interested in the degree of interest and involvement that parents showed in their children's education in contrast to the number of opportunities that I had previously seen made available to parents. Discussions with my colleagues indicated that they felt that parents were not interested in the education of their children and did not want to be involved with schools in general, except for two parents who were described as 'wanting to know'. Whilst I continued my work, I started to question the views of my colleagues and my own observations. After discussions with my supervisors and the Head teacher at my school I decided to focus my doctoral research on how schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs work with the parents of these children.

Terminology SEBD and SEMH

The labels that have been used to describe children with emotional difficulties and/or challenging behaviour have changed over time. The current label used in the field of education in England is Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (DfE/DoH, 2015), although the previous term used in UK legislation was Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (DfES, 2001). Throughout this thesis, the term BESD/SEMH will be used to describe this category of special educational need unless an alternative term or phrase is specifically used by an author or individual. It is the emotional, behavioural and mental health needs of these children which is considered to impact on their ability to learn in school. Further examination of the terminology occurs in the literature review.

Educational provision for children with statements or EHCPs for SEBD/SEMH

The Warnock Report (1978) and the subsequent Education Act (1981) advanced the inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream schools as opposed to their education previously being mainly in special schools. Statements and EHCPs are legal documents which outline the provision that children with special educational needs are given, identifying which school a child is to attend and any additional support that a child needs such as speech and language therapy support or additional teaching assistant (TA) support. In January 2018 there were 115,315 (1.3%) children attending special schools and 119,815 (1.3%) children with statements or EHCPs attending state maintained schools (DfE, 2018b). There has been a change in focus in Government over the last 20 years from the Labour policy of promoting the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Armstrong, 2005) to the Conservative Party policy from 2010 onwards to 'end the bias towards the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools' (Conservative_Party, 2010). In different parts of England children may receive provision that is dependent not only on the national policy described above but also dependent on their own Local Education Authority's (LEAs) policy. A short comparison of the benefits and disadvantages of including most children in local mainstream schools or in special schools is presented below. This is followed by a brief consideration of the types of education provision available for these children in mainstream schools, units and special schools, provided by state sector or independent organisations.

Mainstream or special schools?

One notion is that all children should be taught in their local school, where all children attend a single neighbourhood school and appropriate provision is made for all children within one class (CSIE, 2010). Developing this idea of where children are taught, Booth (2016) highlights the inclusion within the community more deeply when he defines inclusion as:

'the process of increasing the participation of learners within and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of neighbourhood centres of learning'. (p78)

Booth sees this as a part of creating a more inclusive and equal society. Furthermore, Slee (2007) argues that schools can contribute to changes in society as opposed to only reflecting society. They are able to create their own 'social hierarchies'; they are a means by which society can be changed. Thus, a slightly different interpretation of inclusion could be that, by making a greater number of schools more inclusive, where inclusion is about 'social acceptance and instilling a sense of belonging to common institutions' (Norwich, 2008, 137), an idea can be developed that all children should be taught in local schools to build a more inclusive society. This is clearly emphasised in the Removing Barriers to Achievement strategy (DfES, 2004) where the emphasis on inclusion was highlighted in a statement that parents need to have the confidence to choose 'a local mainstream school where their child will receive a good education and be a valued member of the school community' (DfES, 2004, 29). Although not explicitly stated, this seems to imply that mainstream schools should be able to provide a good education that meets the needs of all children.

The policy of including all children with special needs into mainstream schools is challenged by Farrell (2007), who suggests that mainstream schools do not always provide an appropriate curriculum for every child. He raises the question of whether being included in education in a mainstream school necessarily provides a better education than could be delivered in a special school. Warnock (2005) indicated that she felt inclusion has not been totally beneficial and that in her opinion inclusion does not necessarily mean all children under the same roof. Provision for children with BESD/SEMH in mainstream schools can be in the routine classes or withdrawal for some or all lessons to special provision or units. Norwich (2008) advocates that a range of provision is necessary from full inclusion in the main class through to special schools which are attached to mainstream schools in order to fulfil the range of special needs that pupils may have. There is a need to balance conflicting needs: the need to be included in a school with local children and the need to be provided with an appropriate education. If the need for inclusion in the local school is given precedence then this may have the consequence of a reduced quality of education, that may fail to meet the special needs of the individual child (Norwich, 2008). However, if

precedence is given to the need for an education which meets the child's special needs the result may be to identify the child as different and may risk damage to self-esteem and segregation from others, in out of class provision in units or special schools, and possible bullying. The placement of children at a special school can be organised as part of a planned EHCP process (DfE/DoH, 2015) or as the result of the exclusion from a school and then a subsequent EHCP process.

From personal experience teaching in special schools, many parents have described how their children have been excluded from or chosen not to attend their previous mainstream school and have subsequently spent at least some months receiving little or no education after being excluded from school. One interpretation is that the purpose of exclusion can be perceived to be for the benefit of the individual to help them to learn that they are subject to the same rules as everyone else (Haynes, 2005) and to help them to learn an element of self-control. Equally Haynes also indicates that schools may use exclusion for a less altruistic purpose for the benefit of society in terms of helping the teacher by reducing disruption to other pupils in the class and thereby improving their overall education experience. However, there may be no positive benefits for the excluded pupil themselves.

Although schools have the power to exclude a child, more recently there has been a greater emphasis on parental input into the decision-making process of what school a child will attend where an EHCP for SEN is in place. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) states that the local authorities are guided towards provision of education in a mainstream school but allow for provision in special schools as shown in the following quote:

'The presumption of mainstream education is supported by provisions safeguarding the interests of all children and young people and ensuring that the preferences of the child's parents or the young person for where they should be educated are met wherever possible.' (DfE/DoH, 2015. 28)

Children who receive statements of special educational needs and EHCPs have a wide range of different needs in terms of both breadth and severity of their needs. The next section will describe the main and sub-types of provision that

are offered to children with BESD/SEMH needs and will give more detail about the provision in local mainstream schools, state special schools and independent special schools, some of which may provide residential facilities.

There is some evidence that children with BESD/SEMH are both more likely than their peers to leave school without qualifications (Myklebust, 2013) and to be excluded from school than their peers (Achilles et al., 2007; McAra and McVie, 2010). The literature review will discuss in more detail some of the consequences that may occur for children when they do not achieve qualifications and are excluded from schools. One of the reasons that teachers may exclude children from school is the perception that their behaviour is detrimental to the learning of other students in the class (Gottfried and Harven, 2015). An alternative view is that the current pressure on schools to meet the national curriculum (DfE, 2014a) outcomes and the emphasis on testing means that there is less tolerance of children with behavioural issues. This has led to a rise in levels of exclusion of pupils from mainstream schools (Rustique-Forrester, 2005). In contrast, the findings from a study by Hornby and Evans (2014) suggest that staff in special schools had a better understanding of the children's needs than the teachers from their previous mainstream schools. The issues around the exclusion of children with BESD/SEMH needs are pursued in greater detail in the literature review. The next section looks at the different types of provision that are available to children with statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH needs.

Mainstream schools

Some children with statements of special educational needs or EHCPs attend mainstream provision. Table 1.1 below details the number of children attending different types of educational provision in England.

The type of school that a child with special educational needs attends may depend very much on where they live as much as their needs. An example is Coombe Dean School, a mainstream school in Plymouth that describes itself as a 'highly inclusive community school' and how:

'Due to the highly inclusive systems available to all students at Coombe Dean, most students with additional needs will not require specialist SEN

provision, as they are able to make progress relying on whole school systems.’(Coombe-Dean, 2018)

Type of provision	Total Number of children	Number of students with an EHCP or statement in 2018	Percentage of all children with an EHCP or statement
All Schools	8,735,100	253,680	2.9
State-funded primary schools	4,716,245	62,390	1.3
State-funded secondary schools	3,258,450	53,025	1.6
Maintained Special schools	115,315	112,130	97.2
Pupil referral unit	16,730	1,638	9.8
Non-maintained special schools	3,640	3,550	97.5

Table 1.1 School placement of children with SEN (DfE, 2018b)²

This suggests that there is some level of specialist provision at the school. This may be provided within the mainstream classroom or in the form of a unit within the school or withdrawal from class for individual support from specialist staff. Mainstream schools will usually be guided by the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a), which guides the school as to subjects and content to be taught. Mainstream schools may also be influenced by the effect of School League Tables (DfE, 2018a) where the children’s academic performance is compared to the academic performance of children in other schools. Mainstream schools will also often have a class size of around 30, whereas special schools often have smaller class sizes. These factors will combine to make it more difficult for the curriculum to be adapted to meet the individual curriculum needs of children with SEN compared to the way that special schools can have more flexibility to meet children’s needs as described in a following section.

² Children may attend a special school without a statement if they are undergoing an assessment for a statement at the special school.

Nurture groups in mainstream schools

Another form of provision in some mainstream schools are nurture groups which are used by teachers to support vulnerable children who seem unprepared for school and may be at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools (Boxall and Lucas, 2010). One of the main purposes of nurture groups is to address attachment issues (Boxall and Lucas, 2010) where children have behavioural or emotional needs which may be as a result of negative experiences in terms of developing relationships with parents. Although often aimed at primary children there are some secondary schools that provide nurture groups too (Colley, 2009; Cooke et al., 2008; Kourmoulaki, 2013). Nurture groups can help to prevent the deterioration of a pupil's emotional and behavioural needs. However, nurture groups can also be found in some special schools where the aim is to improve academic achievement. This can be seen, for example, in St Nicholas School, where it was found that one of the key roles of the nurture group was to support vulnerable students and help them to develop their 'social and emotional skills and, in particular, their ability to manage a classroom setting' (Ofsted, 2013: 5).

Special schools

Special schools provide an education in a separate setting from mainstream schools and often have smaller numbers of pupils. All children at special schools must have a statement or an EHCP for special educational needs (2014). Special schools can be state schools, non-maintained schools or independent schools. Special schools can provide day provision and/or residential provision. They appear to offer a provision that is more individualised than mainstream provision, offering a 'bespoke timetable' (Fairways School, 2018) and 'vocational training' and 'specialist support services' (St-Edwards, 2019).

Provision at state special schools can be funded at rates of £10,000 per pupil per annum (Croydon Council, 2014; Surrey Council, 2014), plus additional sums for

pupils eligible for pupil premium³. Fees at independent special schools are higher than fees at maintained and non-maintained schools. For example, two independent schools which provide for children with BESD/SEMH needs are Fair ways School where the annual fees for day pupils are between £63,349 - £85,389 (Ofsted, 2018) and Quay Valley School where the fees for day placements are £60,000 (Ofsted, 2019a) and for residential placements from £125,000 - £185,000 (Ofsted, 2015), the 2019 Ofsted report does not show fees for a residential placement. In comparison LEAs give basic funding to mainstream schools per pupil of between £4,827 (Rutland) to £7,873 (Hackney) (DfE, 2019a) for children without special needs. There may be additional funding available for pupils eligible for pupil premium and for those with extra needs; however, there is clearly a significant difference between the money that it costs for a LEA to place a child in a state special school compared to an independent special school. This particularly guides the interests of this study as to what can be achieved in a state school with the lower financial constraints.

The money available to a maintained special school is much less than that available to an independent special school and this contributed to limiting this research project to maintained or non-maintained special schools and to exclude independent special schools. With the financial constraints on LEAs, there may be an incentive to keep children at the schools with the lowest financial cost. However, if children have been excluded from mainstream schools then provision at a special school may be the only option. The decision about the type of

³ Pupil premium is extra funding that the government supplies to schools maintained by the local authority, including: Special schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), academies, free schools, alternative provision (AP) voluntary-sector AP, non-maintained special schools (NMSS) for children with special educational needs for children who are recorded in the school census as having been in care, having been adopted, having FSM in the last six years, child care arrangements, or a special guardianship order (GOV.UK 2017. Guidance Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools

How much pupil premium funding schools and non-mainstream settings receive, how they should spend it and how we hold them to account. . In: AGENCY, D. F. E. A. E. F. (ed.).

educational provision a child receives will be dependent not only on the child's special educational needs but will also be dependent on the educational provision that is available locally. However, when a LEA does have a state special school the costs for running the facility are relatively fixed (Thomas and Loxley, 2007) and thus there is no real incentive for LEAs to reduce the number of children sent to state special schools, unless they are able to close the school totally so this will also be a factor in determining placement, with different LEAs having varying strategies. Table 1.2 illustrates the variation which exists between different LEA policies with regards to special schools. This highlights how the school that a child attends will be determined, in part, by where the child lives.

Local education Authority	Total number of children in education	Number of children in special schools (maintained or other)	Percentage of children with statements in special schools (maintained or other)
Cornwall	43,200	378	0.87
Devon	58,022	1,139	1.96
Plymouth	21,494	641	2.98

Table 1.2 Percentage of children attending special schools in three adjacent LEAs. First Statistical Release 2018 (DfE, 2018b)

Special schools are often smaller than mainstream schools and this can be one difference this can affect the way in which they work. A smaller number of pupils and a higher staff to pupil ratio means that the staff are able to give more focussed time to individual pupils. This is indicated in the Dutch study into parental views carried out by Leenders et al. (2018) where the questionnaire findings suggested that a greater proportion of parents of children in special schools had the perception that teachers were genuinely interested in their child than parents of children in a mainstream school. Similarly Tétreault et al. (2014) in their study into the parents of children with special needs suggest that parents felt that there was better collaboration in providing services to their children between education and health care professionals in special schools than in mainstream schools. However, in contrast to a study by Sedibe and Fourie (2018) into parent-school

relationships in special schools in South Africa via parent focus groups interviews found that:

‘Parents felt disconnected from the school by inadequate teacher knowledge of family circumstances, insufficient opportunities for interaction amongst families and limited school communication to parents. These challenges led to misconceptions by parents and subsequent marginalizing of many families from the school, which further exacerbated their child’s learning problems.’ (p433)

These findings suggest that when schools do not work with parents that this can impact on their children’s education.

A wide range of different approaches to education for children in EBD special schools in Hong Kong were identified by Chong and Mei (2008) including the use of behavioural models such as merits or points based systems, and psychotherapeutic approaches were used where students may needed to overcome other issues before they were ready to learn. Chong and Mei also reported that teachers felt the need to use a sense of humour to overcome students’ resistance to authority as well as the approach of ‘catch them being good’. Structural approaches using the fair and firm application of rules with an immediacy of discussion of issues and subsequent consequences was also used so that children could link their actions to the rules and any consequences as well as adapting curriculum content to children’s needs. Although these techniques could all be used in a mainstream school, it would be easier for teachers in a special school to follow these approaches when they have fewer students as they have a greater probability of knowing each child and also more time to focus on each child.

The positive impact of special schools for EBD children is identified in a study by Farrell and Polat (2003) where they interviewed 26 former students of a special school with boarding provision. Most of the interviewees had positive recollections of their education and one stated that he felt he had only obtained

his GCSEs⁴, because he had attended this school. The students described several positive aspects about the school such as good relationships with staff and small class sizes. The students perceived that the school had helped them to:

‘develop self-respect, self-confidence and self-esteem: being able to calm down and control their temper; developing their attention span; and help in establishing relationships with their peer group and learning to respect others.’ (p248)

Similarly, Nind et al. (2012) indicate, from their study of a small girls’ special school, that the staff at the special school had a better understanding of their SEMH/SEBD needs than staff at their previous mainstream schools. This indicates the difference in the perception that the children who attend special schools for BESD/SEMH have of the differences between their special school and their previous mainstream provision.

The different forms of provision that children with BESD/SEMH needs attend have been discussed in this section. Further discussion on how these children achieve will be included in the literature review where there is evidence that this particular group of pupils is underachieving. It is the responsibility of individual schools to find appropriate methods to support children to achieve their full potential. One method of supporting children is to work in partnership with their parents. The next section describes the structure of the thesis.

Structure of thesis

The thesis describes a research study to investigate how maintained special schools work with the parents to support children with a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH needs within the 11-16 age group.

⁴ GCSE’s (General Certificate of Secondary Education), are qualifications taken by children aged 16 in England and Wales.

Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which discusses BESD/SEMH, and factors which impact on the development of these needs. It also includes data on the numbers and proportions of children with these needs and the forms of provision of education for these children are attending and finally considers how schools can work with parents and some of the barriers which have to be overcome for schools to work with parents. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach taken for the research project and considers how the two-phased research project was designed and implemented and how data were collected and analysed. Chapter 4 describes the findings from the research project, including details from both phases of the project, then combining the data to outline practices and behaviours that were identified by the research. Chapter 5 is the discussion chapter and considers the themes developed through the project about schools and parents working together. The final chapter, Chapter 6, is the conclusion, which explores the key themes, the strengths and limitations of this research project, and also considers ways in which schools can work with parents and identifies areas for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This literature review explores three areas, as outlined in Figure 2.1. The initial section will consider the BESD/SEMH needs, exploring the terminology and the needs of children with BESD/SEMH and school provision. It also considers factors that may influence the development of BESD/SEMH needs, and how the children's needs impact on their learning and life-long outcomes and how special schools can work with parents. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of schools working with parents in relation to children's outcomes, then finally, narrowing the focus, considering how special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents.

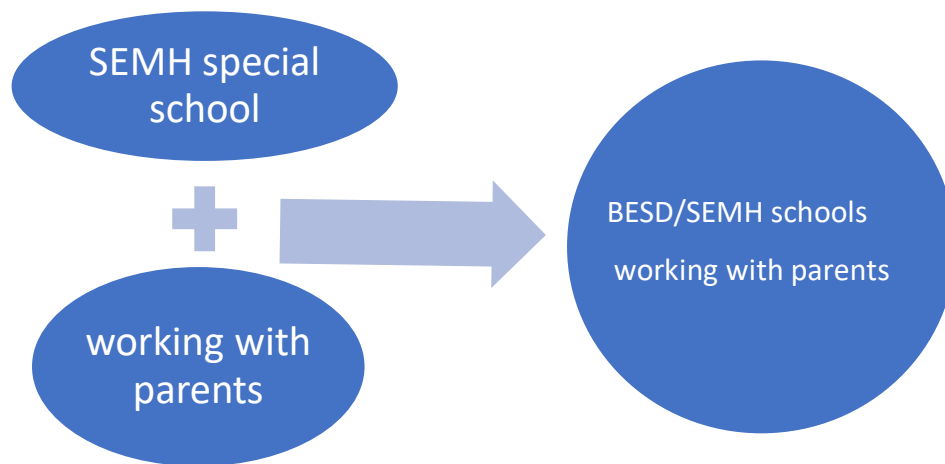


Figure 2.1 Areas of discussion in the literature review

Search Strategy

Prior to the research project taking place some reading had already taken place around the topic of children with special needs and specifically around children with BESD or EBD needs, this fed into the research project. The initial search strategy was completed using three databases: ERIC, British Education Index (BEI) and Education Research Complete. The search terms used were

- 'Parent' or Carer

AND

- 'special school'

AND

- 'EBD' OR 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' OR 'emotional and behavioural disorders' OR 'SEBD' OR 'social and emotional behaviour difficulties' OR 'BESD' OR 'behavioural emotional social difficulties' OR 'SEMH' or 'social emotional mental health'

This produced a total of 11 articles when the search terms were restricted to the abstract of the documents. Therefore, a strategy was chosen that focussed on individual areas of the topic, for example, searching about the impact of BESD/SEMH on achievement. The search terms used included, for the first search term:

- EBD' OR 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' OR 'emotional and behavioural disorders' OR 'SEBD' OR 'social and emotional behaviour difficulties' OR 'BESD' OR 'behavioural emotional social difficulties' OR 'SEMH' or 'social emotional mental health'

Different search terms were then added, including 'low socio-economic status', 'behaviour', 'academic achievement', 'literacy achievement'. In each case when articles were identified and read, any relevant references were followed up by further research in the area, with the aim to give greater breadth to the study. The same approach was used for working with parents, where the first search term was: 'parent' OR 'carer' and then subsequent terms included 'academic achievement', 'special needs', 'literacy', and numeracy. When a particular article cited a document that was relevant to this thesis, this new article was read and then used if appropriate. This approach of following up citations allowed for documents to be used which were not located using the initial search terms. An issue that this approach raises is that this may have led to a bias in the search for literature and missed areas which were relevant. In retrospect an opportunity was missed to use additional search terms found from the documents to find a wider range of literature on the topic.

Statistical information was gained from current and previous versions of the Department for Education (DfE) website and documents that were stored in the National Archives.

Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties/Social Emotional and Mental Health needs [BESD/SEMH] and school provision

Children with statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH needs form a diverse group of children with a wide range of emotional and behaviour difficulties. The following sections will discuss how their needs have been defined and described in England, in terms of legislation. The factors which can affect how an identification of BESD/SEMH develops and how BESD/SEMH can affect a child's life outcomes will then be discussed

Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties /Social Emotional and Mental Health [BESD/SEMH]: terminology and needs

There are a number of different terms that can be used to describe this large group of children who have a wide range of special educational needs. The terms used have changed over time and also vary internationally. Social, Emotional and Mental Health [SEMH] needs is the term currently used in English legislation to describe one category of children with special educational needs (DfE/DoH, 2015). However, this is one term of many that can and have been used to describe children in this group who have a wide range of different behaviours. The term Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) was used in previous legislation (DfES, 2001), however the professional body for teachers and researchers who work or study these children, has chosen to retain the SEBD term within their organisational name (SEBDA, nd). Ofsted (2005) use Emotional, Behavioural and Social difficulties (EBSD) which illustrates the wide range of terms that can be used to describe children with a broad range of needs. Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBDA) has been used in England however, in America the more commonly used term is Emotional and Behavioural

Disorders (Kauffman and Landrum, 2013) The following section will explore some of the terms that have been used to describe this group of children over time.

In England a child's right to an education has been provided for in legislation technically, since the 1870 Forster Education Act and the subsequent Acts that have updated this. The Warnock Report (1978) describes how the 1941 *Education After the War* Green Paper introduced the category of handicap of 'Maladjusted', that was enacted in the 1944 *Education Act*. This became the category that was used to describe children with behavioural needs until the introduction of the term Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in the 1955 Underwood Report (Daniels and Cole, 2002). The Warnock Report (1978) and the subsequent 1981 Education Act introduced the term Special Educational Needs (SEN). Statements of SEN were introduced to provide support for children when:

'the special educational provision necessary to meet the child's needs cannot reasonably be provided within the resources normally available to mainstream schools and early education setting' (DfES, 2001).

In the subsequent Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) support was to be provided for children with SEN that were not so severe or complex in the form of School Action, and School Action Plus which required schools to support children with SEN that were not so severe that a statement of SEN was required. In 1994 the description of EBD was clarified in terms of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties as ranging:

'from social maladaptation to abnormal emotional stresses. They are persistent (if not necessarily permanent) and constitute learning difficulties. They may be multiple and may manifest themselves in many different forms and severities. They may become apparent through withdrawn, passive, aggressive or self-injurious tendencies.'
(DfEE 1994: 7)

The 2001 Code of Practice introduced four broad dimensions of SEN: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; behaviour, emotional and social development and sensory and/or physical. The Code of Practice (2001) was responsible for introducing the term BESD as the category for children with

difficulties with their behaviour or their emotions or who experienced social difficulties.

‘demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs.’ (DfES, 2001)

The 2014 Children and Families Act and the subsequent updated Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) replaced Statements of SEN with EHCP and reduced the number of SEN categories to four main areas. The SEN area of BESD was removed and a new area of need – Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs was introduced, indicating that behavioural problems on their own do not necessarily indicate a SEN and showing a recognition of how mental health can impact on behaviour.

‘Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.’ (DfE/DoH, 2015, 98)

However, according to Norwich and Eaton (2015), the new Code of Practice continues to lack definitions of thresholds to show that children have a SEN. This ambiguity about whether a child has or does not have sufficient needs to warrant an EHCP presents problems, particularly for children with SEMH (Boesley and Crane, (2018)). In Boesley and Crane’s (2018) study they looked at the views of 16 SENCOs, working in primary and secondary schools, on the process of the introduction of EHCPs. The findings suggested that there remained a focus on educational targets and levels in the EHCP system. They suggested that for children with SEMH needs, this meant that children had to reach a point of crisis before serious consideration was given to supporting their needs.

This brief outline of the education for children with BESD/SEMH highlights some of the changes and issues in the way that terminology has been used. The

following section will examine how the socio-economic status of the child's family may impact on their BESD/SEMH needs.

Socio-economic status and students with SEBD/SEMH

Ofsted (2005) reported that, in England, children with BESD/SEMH may 'face disadvantage and disturbance in their family lives' (p4). There is a wide range of terminology around the concept of socioeconomic status; the following section will explore some of the meanings of terms used in this thesis.

The term 'poverty', for example, can have different meanings; here some different definitions are provided and their context explained within this thesis. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines 'income poverty' as 'when a family's income fails to meet a federally established threshold that differs across countries.'(UNESCO, 2017, np). 'Relative poverty', on the other hand, is defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as:

'poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context.' (UNESCO, 2017, np)

The latter definition indicates that individuals and families in relative poverty have fewer financial resources available to them than other members of their society, and the first definition indicates that the amount of financial resources that are required by an individual or family to be in (or out of) poverty could be different in different countries. In addition, the WHO defines the concept of extreme poverty (not used in this thesis) as living on less than one dollar a day (WHO, 2019) which is consistent across all countries. However, UNESCO suggest that economic poverty cannot be considered on its own but in relation to its impact on an individual's human rights to gain employment, access health care, education and to maintain their cultural identity and engage with their community.

The United Kingdom (UK) government measures the impact of an individual's employment on their life using a socioeconomic classification system, which considers an individual's occupational title, whether they are considered to be

employed or self-employed or if within their role they have a responsibility for supervising other employees (The_Office_for_National_Statistics, 2010). This leads to the generation of eight occupational categories which are linked to job role (e.g. higher and lower managerial classes as well as semi-routine and routine occupations). This classification system is used by many government departments to study if and how the socioeconomic status of an individual or family impacts on other areas of their lives there are many different factors including, children's education and health (GOV.UK, 2016). This importance of both the social and economic roles of individuals is emphasised by Appiah (2018) who suggests that, although there are many arguments against the use of class, it may be used as a way to define people not only in terms of their employment and financial situation, but is also strongly linked to an individual's social status.

Savage et al. (2013) describe working class individuals as part of a group who have:

‘Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable house price, few social contacts, emerging cultural capital’(Savage et al., 2013, 230)

This definition includes not just economic factors but also describes the individuals access to cultural capital. This compares to the middle classes, where individuals can be described as having:

‘High economic capital, high status of mean contacts, high highbrow and emerging cultural capital.’ (Savage et al., 2013, 230)

Although these definitions vary, they all indicate common factors of individuals or families who lack the financial resources that others in their society have and the suggestion that this may impact on their ability to access other cultural, educational and health resources.

The suggestion of links between BESD/SEMH needs and low socio-economic status, as noted earlier, can also be found internationally. Children from working class families in Ireland are more likely to be labelled as having SEBD or SEMH needs than children from middle class families (Banks et al., 2012), although this is an Irish study it makes the link between social class and the identification of

children as having SEBD/SEMH needs. Research in Portugal (Cadima et al., 2016) found that children from schools in areas which were predominantly lower socio-economic status showed lower levels of self-regulation in neutral (no-emotional task) compared to peers from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. Reiss (2013) carried out a review of studies into the impact of low socio-economic status and mental health issues in children aged 4-18 years. He found 55 studies in which 52 showed a link between low socio-economic status and higher risk of mental health issues. However, it is suggested that it is not particular issues that individually determine whether a child will develop SEBD that will increase the probability that a child will develop SEBD (Kauffman and Landrum, 2013; Markson et al., 2016) but the accumulation of multiple risk factors. The following section will firstly explore evidence that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at greater risk of being labelled as having SEBD or SEMH needs. It will then explore the risk factors that could contribute to increased reporting of SEBD/SEMH needs, splitting these into internal factors that relate to the family and external factors which impact on the family.

Evidence that students labelled as having SEBD or SEMH needs are more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds

An indicator of low socio-economic status is whether a child is eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM). DfE data (2018b, Additional Tables :Table D) indicates that the percentage of pupils with a statement or EHCP for BESD or SEMH who receive FSM is higher than that for other categories of SEN, for example, 41.2% (this compares to 36.2% for children with moderate learning difficulties, the next highest percentage, followed by 34.1% for severe learning difficulties). The DfE data (2018b, National Tables: Table 5) also shows that a higher proportion of students who have statements or EHCPs in special schools are registered as being eligible to receive FSM (36.2% in special schools compared to 25.7% of children with EHCPs in mainstream secondary schools. Only 12.4% of children without SEN in a mainstream school were receiving FSM. This would appear to indicate, therefore, that children attending special schools for BESD/SEMH needs are more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Factors that can affect the development of SEBD/SEMH

Children's special educational needs are categorised into different groups (DfE/DoH, 2015; DfES, 2001). Some groups of special needs are 'normative', meaning that they can be measured and there is agreement about 'normal functioning', for example, hearing impairment and deafness or visual impairment and blindness (Banks et al., 2012). Other 'non-normative' types of special needs are affected more by the environment. BESD/SEMH needs falls into the latter category, suggesting that it is the environment which can affect the way the child's special needs 'develop'. The higher percentages of children with BESD/SEMH receiving FSM, as previously mentioned, appears to indicate that low socio-economic status/poverty may be a factor in the development of BESD/SEMH needs. There are several aspects that may contribute to this. It may be that parents from families from lower socio-economic status do not have the skills to manage their children's behaviour and the parents' responses to behavioural issues can reinforce the child's unwanted behaviour (Kauffman and Landrum, 2013). This may also link to the long held suggestion that socio-economic backgrounds may lack an awareness of ways to support their children in the ways that schools expect the children to be supported (Lareau, 1987; Nakagawa, 2000). The analysis of parental involvement in the study carried out by Nakagawa (2000) also indicated that when parents do not understand the schools' expectations of how parents are to support their children, they may be unable to help students to prepare for school. This in consequence may lead children to be unaware of the way that they are expected to behave in school, and their behaviours may not meet the standards expected by schools.

This lack of parental understanding can be exacerbated when the backgrounds of the teachers and the family are dissimilar. Crozier (2001) suggested that teachers are often white and middle class. In consequence teachers may not always appreciate a child's background and the style of communication at home (Gold and Richards, 2012). They may misjudge a child's ability due to this lack of appreciation of their home culture and lack of understanding of the differences between the home culture and what is expected at school. Boutte and Johnson (2013) show how a child's experience of home language and culture can conflict

with the polite language from the dominant culture. Whilst Boutte and Johnson study is from the US it shows that a teacher's lack of understanding of the child's home culture can prevent the teacher fully appreciating a child's abilities or potential. Kauffman and Landrum (2013) suggest that teachers need to consider what aspects of their own cultures are essential to the education process and which can be adapted to allow the child to express their own culture.

The home lives of some children can be very challenging. For example, when children experience loss, stress or neglect this can cause attachment difficulties (Bombèr, 2007). Similarly, when children experience or witness violence in their home lives or other areas of their lives, this can cause anxiety and stress and cause attachment difficulties (Batmanghelidj, 2009). Attachment difficulties can make it more difficult for children to focus on their learning (Bombèr, 2007). Further, it has been noted that poverty can be a contributing factor in intimate partner violence (Friedemann-Sánchez and Lovatón, 2012), and that women from poorer backgrounds can find it more difficult to escape from intimate partner violence situations due to a lack of means (Slabbert, 2017, 223). When a child lives in a family that experiences intimate partner violence the child can have an increased risk of developing both internalising and externalising behaviours (Kitzmann et al., 2003). This appears to indicate that low socio-economic status and domestic violence may also be linked to how BESD/SEMH needs may develop in a child.

This next section will examine how poverty and homelessness can have an impact on parent child relationships (Kauffman and Landrum, 2013) and how these external factors impact on a child. A number of studies have found that reduced family income can increase a child's risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties. For example, Hosokawa and Katsura (2018) indicate that even relative poverty can influence a child's emotional and behavioural development. Similarly, children from families that are unemployed are more likely to be identified as having EBD (Banks et al., 2012). A study carried out by Akee et al. (2010) looked at the impact of extra family funding to American Indian families from a casino that opened. This allowed them to contrast the impact of the funding

on the families who gained the extra money and those who did not. Although they did not study the impact of the funding on EBD, they found that young people from families who had received the funding had a lower probability of being arrested, or having dealt drugs and a higher probability of remaining in school for longer than young people from the families who had not received the funding. The authors note that this improvement may be due to a reduction in the economic stress in the family rather than on any change in employment within the family (Akee et al., 2010). Whilst this study is from America it illustrated the link between family income and children's behaviour.

Yoshikawa et al. (2006), in their United States (US) study, found that parents in low-wage employment found it difficult to manage their children's behaviour with the requirements of their jobs. They also noted that children who have mothers who experienced stressful working environments could have more internalising behaviours such as anxiety and depression. Total family income is likely to have an impact on the amount of money that can be allocated to housing (Coley et al., 2013). Housing status can also have an impact on a child's risk of being identified as having BESD/SEMH, with poor quality housing indicating that children might have greater behavioural difficulties (Coley et al., 2013). Equally, family home-ownership, which may be linked to higher socio-economic status and greater ability within the family to achieve planning and organising required to maintain the house and pay bills, may be linked to reduced childhood behaviour problems (Boyle, 2002).

It is not just the family that the child grows up in that may affect their development, but also the neighbourhood. Local poverty, drug and alcohol abuse within the family neighbourhood can increase the risks of a child developing problem behaviours (Fitzgerald et al., 2002). In their study into stress in Spanish primary school children, Fernández-Baena et al. (2014) indicated that the children from economically deprived areas experienced higher numbers of stressors. Similarly, they found that children with poor social adaptation, either inhibited or aggressive behaviours, were more likely to experience high levels of stressors in their lives. Although this is a Spanish study it indicates that it is not just the family

circumstances that impacts on the child's behaviour, but also the social situation of the local area that they live in. Banks et al. (2012) suggest that children from more disadvantaged families are more likely to be indicated as having EBD than children from less disadvantaged families. In contrast a study carried out by Fovet (2011) into the records from a Canadian private school for children with SEBD suggests that the socio-economic factors are less than other researchers imply. Fovet suggest that children showing the same behaviours but from more affluent backgrounds are less likely to be labelled SEBD than children from less affluent backgrounds.

As noted, whilst poverty and neighbourhood disadvantages are risk factors for children developing BESD/SEMH needs, not all children do so, and a range of protective factors have been identified which may help to reduce the risk of children developing SEBD/SEMH. Fernández-Baena et al. (2014) point out that the higher levels of risk factors [stressors] could contribute to the development of poorly adaptive behaviour. This is either because the risk factors prevent the development of socially appropriate behaviours or because the child's low levels of social competence generate additional risk factors or a combination of both of these reasons. A study by Flouri et al. (2015) into the behavioural issues of pre-school and primary aged children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods suggests that one factor may be that children with higher IQs are better able to manage the social interactions that are required on starting school than their peers from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds who have lower IQs. Another protective factor for the identification of EBD is the gender of the child with boys being identified with EBD significantly more than girls (Banks et al., 2012), and this is discussed in the next section.

Gender balance of children identified as having SEBD/SEMH

There appears to be a gender imbalance in terms of identification of children with BESD/SEMH needs with boys more heavily represented than girls (Cole et al.,

2003). This section will first consider evidence to support this statement and the current position and then look at the factors that might contribute to this situation.

Evidence for gender imbalance in the identification of children with SEBD/SEMH needs

There is a gender imbalance in the number of children identified as needing support for BESD/SEMH needs in England. In January 2018, 116,718 boys and 46,916 girls were identified as having significant needs for SEN support for SEMH needs, (71% boys and 29 % girls), of those issued with EHCPs or Statements for SEMH (30,023), 85% were boys (25,529) and 15% were girls (4,494). There is no significant change from when Cooper et al. (1991) reported that in their survey of facilities providing for children with EBD in England and Wales (85% of pupils were boys and 15% were girls). Similar figures were identified for 2012-13 (DfE, 2013). This disproportionate representation of boys is also found internationally. A study carried out by Oswald et al. (2003) of the gender misrepresentation of SEN in the US found that overall boys were about 3.5 times more likely to be identified as having 'emotional disturbance' than girls, compared to being about twice as likely to be found to have learning disabilities needing support or 1.4 times as likely to have 'mental retardation'. Although this study is from the US it reinforces the gender differences of the reporting of BESD/SEMH needs. Thus, there appears to be evidence that there is a gender imbalance with respect to the number and proportion of children being identified as needing support for BESD/SEMH needs.

The main reason for students to be identified as having EBD as suggested by Soles et al. (2008) in their study in Canada is that they display externalising behaviour as opposed to internalising behaviours, thus giving one possible explanation for the difference in the gender balance of SEN needs. Poulou (2015) describes the differences between the sets of behaviours as:

'Externalizing problems are outer-directed and involve acting out, defiant and noncompliant behaviours. Internalizing problems are more inner-directed and involve withdrawal, depression and anxiety.' (p226)

A Norwegian study by Andersson (2002) notes that more boys (7511) than girls (2218) were referred to the psychiatric service for externalising behaviour

problems (3.4.-1). However, when the age of the child was considered he found that there were differences in the age of referral between boys and girls. 67.3% of the boys were referred between the ages of 6-12 years, compared with 57.1% of the girls referred within the same age range. In the older age group, 13-17 years, the proportion of the girls referred to the clinic increased (32.4%) whereas the proportion of the boys dropped (21.7%). The reason for this may be that it takes professionals a longer time to become aware of the special educational needs of girls in comparison to the time for them to notice the special educational needs of boys, as their needs are of different types. This difference in type of need is also commented on by Maguire et al. (2016) who note that girls have lower levels of conduct problems and hyperactivity than boys, but that girls have higher levels of peer problems than boys.

A study was carried out in Egypt by Emam (2012), using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Conner's Teacher Rating Scale, both of which are instruments for measuring the level of a child's behavioural, emotional and social needs, into middle school children's pro-social behaviours, aimed to examine whether pro-social behaviours are a protective factor against EBDs. Pro-social behaviours are defined by Emam (2012) as: 'behaviours which are carried out for the aid or benefit of others' (Emam, 2012, 83). The findings from this study indicate that girls showed more pro-social behaviours than boys, scoring more highly on caring, consideration, kindness and sympathy, helping and sharing. In contrast boys were scored more highly than girls on conduct problems, hyperactivity or inattention, emotional symptoms and peer problems (externalising behaviours). Whilst this study is from Egypt it explores one possible reason for the gender imbalance of children with BESD/SEMH needs. Soles et al. (2008) suggest that teachers reported both boys and girls as having more severe externalising behaviours than internalising behaviours, however overall a greater proportion of boys (72%) than girls (28%) were identified as having externalising behaviours. This suggests that girls may need to demonstrate more severe behaviours than boys before teachers put in a referral for an SEN assessment. This links to a suggestion made by Nind et al. (2012) that some teachers may not understand the needs of girls with SEBD/SEMH. Dietz and

Montague (2006) suggest that teachers may be unaware of the behavioural needs of female students and may not refer them for interventions. This could lead to a lower proportion of girls being identified as needing support compared to boys, as indicated at the start of this section.

Outcomes of children with BESD/SEMH needs

The following section will explore the impact of BESD/SEMH needs on children in terms of their behaviour and their academic and other achievements and how these affect their long-term outcomes.

School based outcomes

In this section how BESD/SEMH needs impacts on children's academic achievement will be explored, and their rate of exclusion from school (Hornby and Evans, 2014). The meta-analysis carried out by Reid et al. (2004) of 25 studies covering 2486 children, noted that 101 measurements of academic outcome were recorded by the studies and that in 90 of these measurements children with emotional/behavioural disturbance generally had lower academic achievement than their peers without disabilities particularly in Mathematics and spelling. Reid et al. (2004) also noted that the educational setting, whether in special schools, resource rooms or mainstream education had little impact on educational outcome. A study carried out by Hornby and Evans (2014) in New Zealand into the ex-students of a residential special school for children with SEBD, found that only two of the participants gained any academic qualifications, although all had been judged to be average or above average ability before joining the school. A Texan study by Carr-George et al. (2009) into the achievement of children with EBD suggested that students who were educated in more separate settings or settings with a higher proportion of children from schools with a low socio-economic status background (50%) participated less in state wide formal reading assessments compared to students that attended schools that were not indicated as having a low socio-economic status background. Although this study is from Texas it indicates that lack of achievement that can be linked to children with SEBD/SEMH needs from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The DfE (2015) points out that where young people do not attend school, they miss out on learning opportunities and this generally leads to lower academic achievement. The DfE (2019c) shows how pupils with SEMH needs are more likely to be persistent absentees (27.6%, 48,110 children) than any other group of children with SEN except those with profound and multiple learning difficulties (44.6%, 3725 children) and those with physical disabilities (29.1%, 8570 children). Persistent absence is defined as students missing more than 10% of possible sessions during an academic year (DfE, 2019b). In special schools persistent absenteeism peaks in year 11 (DfE, 2019c). Taylor (2012) emphasises how this has continued consequences in:

‘that children with poor attendance are unlikely to succeed academically and they are more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) when they leave’ (p3).

Non-attendance, in the form of truancy, does not only impact on academic achievement but can also lead to unemployment and substance abuse later in life (Kaufmann and Landrum, 2013). Harriss et al. (2008) suggest that many children who have had poor life experiences can become hyper-vigilant, for those who experience or witness violence this can be to protect themselves in whatever way they can from the abuser. In consequence, these children can find it very difficult to remain focussed in lessons as any possible distraction can be perceived as a threat (Geddes, 2006), which can impact on their academic achievement.

Children with a statement of SEN or an EHCP are nearly three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school⁵ 0.16% (370) than those pupils that do not have SEN 0.06% (4,115) (DfE, 2018d, Table 5). This particularly impacts on children with a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH needs where the rate of permanent exclusion is 1.09% (2030 children). This is more than twice as high

⁵ Includes all academies including free schools, state-funded and non-maintained special schools, middle schools as deemed, all-through schools, city technology colleges, university technology colleges and studio schools, but excludes nursery schools, independent schools, general hospital schools and pupil referral units.

as the next nearest group of children, those with an EHCP for 'other difficulties/disabilities' 0.24% (130 children). Similarly, the rate for fixed term exclusions for children with a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH needs is 46.34% compared to the next highest group of children, those with a statement or EHCP for other difficulties/disabilities at 11.92% (DfE, 2018d, Table 6). A study carried out by Achilles et al. (2007) in the US looked at factors that affect the exclusion rates of children with disabilities. The findings suggest that children placed within the EBD, ADHD category were more likely to be excluded than children with learning disabilities. Munn and Lloyd (2005) indicate that exclusion from school is not just the event, but also a process whereby the young people are excluded from the society of school. The impact of a lack of success at school can have a lifelong impact and this is considered in the next section.

The long-term impact can be seen in that people who leave school without qualifications are more likely, than peers with qualifications, to require social security (Myklebust, 2013) as opposed to earning their own living. McAra and McVie (2010) demonstrate a positive correlation between persistent young offenders and exclusion from school. A crucial factor to note (Hornby and Evans, 2014) is that for those young people who have previously committed offences, but do not continue to offend, their level of exclusion from school is less than young people who continue to commit offences. Vacca (2008) examined the reasons for the importance of attending school and gaining academic skills and qualifications. This author suggests that young people with poor literacy skills show a greater chance of becoming juvenile offenders, and that for those lacking these skills there is a greater chance of recidivism. Involvement with the criminal justice systems has been found to be in excess of 50% for children with EBD (Bradley et al., 2008). The risk factors for becoming involved in crime (Audit Commission, 1996) include being male, experiencing poor parenting, playing truant, being excluded from school, and pressure from peer groups as well as using drugs and alcohol. These are similar to key indicators for children having a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH needs. A study carried out by the Audit Commission (1996) showed that young people involved in crime feel that having a job would be a key factor in preventing another young person from becoming

involved in crime. However, Hornby and Evans (2014), in New Zealand, found that only just over 50% of ex-students of a residential special school for pupils with SEBD were in employment [31% full-time, 21% part-time]. Many of the jobs 'required minimal training or qualifications, were low paid and had minimal job security or prospects' (p 338), suggesting that even though the ex-students were initially judged to be of average or better abilities they were not fulfilling their potential. Similarly, Dickinson and Miller (2002) found that some ex-pupils perceived that their attendance at a special school for BESD/SEMH had a negative impact on their Curriculum Vitae and made it more difficult for them to gain employment. This data indicates that for these children their behaviour and the consequences of exclusion can have long lasting impact on their educational achievements, their employment prospects and their involvement with the criminal justice system. The suggestion from Morris (1996), from over 20 years ago, that if schools do not improve the way they work with these young people that they 'are unlikely to take their place in society with responsibility and purpose' (p38) is still relevant today.

Special schools for students with BESD/SEMH needs

Children with statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH needs may attend different types of provision, including mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units, as discussed in the introduction, and this is explored in detail later in this section. There was a policy trend to increase the number of children with SEN attending mainstream schools in England from the Warnock Report (1978) up until 2006. However, a change in government saw a greater focus on parental choice and a continued increase in the number of children attending special schools. Within the Removing Barriers to Achievement strategy (DfES, 2004) the emphasis on inclusion was highlighted in the statement:

'All children, wherever they are educated, need to be able to learn, play and develop alongside each other within their local community of schools' (p6)

This is reinforced in the *Children and Families Act* (2014) which indicates that there is a general presumption that children and young people with SEN should be taught in mainstream schools. There remains a situation, however, where

there are both special schools and mainstream schools that a child with special needs could attend as well as some alternative provision options or PRUs and hospital schools. Baker (2007) examined government policy on SEN relating to special schools and suggested that, at that time, whilst emphasising inclusion, government policy included the option that some children would be taught in separate provision in special schools. This policy of special school provision has been continued under subsequent governments.

Although, some organisations, such as the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, actively pursue a policy for all children in the local school (CSIE, 2018), there are also concerns that this is not beneficial for all children in the same school and having all children in the same place may not be the best solution for all children (Warnock, 2005). Lindsay (2007) commented that there was not enough evidence to suggest that including all children with SEN in a mainstream school provided an effective education for all. That mainstream schools always provide a better education has also been challenged by Farrell (2007). He argued that mainstream schools do not always provide an appropriate curriculum for some children, and challenged the value of inclusion, raising questions of whether an inclusive education in a mainstream school provides a better education than could be provided in a separate special school.

There is also an issue concerning the conflicting rights that young people have either to be educated within their own community or whether they should have the right to be educated separately. The dilemma is whether it is more damaging to treat the individual differently because of their difference(s) and risk highlighting them because of this or to treat them the same as others, to reduce the difference between themselves and others, but increase the possibility of not meeting their needs. Norwich (2008) states that in any dilemma there are no ideal options, just an attempt to find resolutions with the least damaging consequences. He suggests that a range of provision is required to support children with SEN from fully inclusive local schools to residential special schools, where the special schools have strong links with local mainstream schools. The focus in this thesis is on special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs, and the next section

discusses the change in numbers of special schools over recent years, and changes to the numbers of pupils with SEN.

Overall, there was a very small reduction in the number of special schools in England between 2012 and 2018. The DfE (2013) show that out of a total of 1039 special schools that there were 967 maintained special schools and 72 non-maintained special schools. In January 2018 this reduced to a total of 1033 special schools, but there was an increase in the number of state funded special schools (974) and a decrease in the number of non-maintained special schools (59). This is a slight decrease of 0.6% (DfE, 2018b). However, the number of children attending state funded special schools with a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH needs increased between 2012 and 2018 from 91,590 to 115,315. This is an increase from 1.07% of all pupils in 2012 to 1.32% of all pupils in 2018, (DfE, 2018b). A similar increase was found in the number of children attending PRUs in 2012. There were 13,495 children in 2012 (0.10%) and this increased to 16,370 in 2018 (0.18%). However, there was a reduction in the number of children attending provision at non-maintained special schools between 2012 (4,235) and 2018 (3,625) dropping from 0.06% of all pupils in 2012 to 0.04% of all pupils in 2018 (DfE, 2018b). There has also been a comparable increase in the number of children attending special schools with a primary need of severe learning difficulties and speech language and communication needs. Contrastingly there was a drop in the number of children with moderate learning difficulties attending special schools. The total number of state-funded and non-maintained special schools was 1033 in 2018, as stated above. Special schools can be approved for provision for more than one type of SEN. It is of particular interest that the total number of different approvals for special schools was 4516 in 2012 (DfE, 2013) and this had increased to 4712 by January 2018. This suggests that more schools sought and gained approval to provide for a wider range of special needs. However, the opposite appears to have happened in terms of the provision for children with BESD/SEMH needs. In 2012 there were 518 maintained special

schools approved for provision of education for children with BESD⁶ and 28 non-maintained schools, a total of 546 schools in total (DfE, 2013). By 2018 this had reduced to 361 state funded special schools approved for provision of education for SEMH needs, including special academies and free schools but excluding nursery schools, independent schools, general hospital schools and PRUs There were also 20 non-maintained schools approved for provision of education for children with SEMH needs (DfE, 2018c), thus totalling 381 schools approved for provision for this type of need.

Factors leading to children attending special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs

The initial entry criteria for children in the UK to attend a special school is that they must have a statement of SEN or an EHCP (DfE/DoH, 2015). The following section explores what factors might contribute to a child attending a special school for BESD/SEMH needs as opposed to mainstream provision. Hornby and Evans (2014) suggest that in many countries children with the most serious SEBD needs attend specialist provision and that a key factor is that teachers in mainstream provision find their behaviour particularly challenging. The following will be a consideration of how teacher factors and school factors contribute to children attending special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs.

It has been suggested that the way that schools are organised and their structure can exacerbate children's behavioural issues rather than minimise them (Jull, 2008). It is also argued that the academic curriculum prescribed to be followed in a mainstream school may be unhelpful to children with SEBD (Garner, 2014). Examples of comments from the children in the study carried out by Garner (2014) include:

‘ “What I learn here (mainstream school) is no good to me, there ain't nothing useful so that ... I'll be able to get a job with it or anything.” ’

‘ “*That's why I'm not interested and don't come (to school) a lot of the time.*” ’
(Garner, 2014, 296)

⁶ BESD is the category of special education need in 2013, this changed to SEMH in 2015.

The academic curriculum followed in mainstream schools may contribute to how some children with SEBD struggle to fit into mainstream schools and are excluded and then attend special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs. Dickinson and Miller (2002, 198) suggest that poor experiences of school may impact negatively on a child, and a child's initial needs may be compounded by the experiences of 'layers of poor academic progress, lack of friends and severe discipline.' Kauffman and Badar (2016) suggest that full inclusion can increase stress for both teachers and students, making it impossible for teachers to fulfil the job and provide adequate differentiation for a class with a wide range of needs. This is illustrated by examples of the specialisms that occur in maternity hospitals, intensive care units which is as accepted as normal, however when in a school to provide special education is seen by some as being wrong. Kauffman and Badar (2016) suggest that the level of differentiation required by full inclusion can be more than most teachers can achieve. One of the perceived benefits of inclusion is that children socialise together, however the 'social benefits should not come at the expense of appropriate instruction' (p57). The majority of teachers are not able to complete all the tasks required for full inclusion unless they are exceptionally gifted and/or work exceptional hours. There are some concerns about the impact on the inclusion of children with BESD/SEMH needs on the rest of the children in a class. Gottfried and Harven (2015) suggest that when a class has a child with EBD, other children within the class may underachieve academically compared to classes without EBD children. There is a suggestion that the pressures of the National Curriculum and the culture of testing has led to schools becoming less tolerant of children with behavioural issues and rises in levels of exclusion of pupils (Rustique-Forrester, 2005). Hornby and Evans (2014) suggest that the children from their study found that the staff in special schools had a better understanding of their needs than the teachers from their previous mainstream schools.

This perception of staff having a better understanding of children with BESD/SEMH needs is noted by Nind et al. (2012). A specific example of how staff can understand and respect the pupils was given by a student called Bella

who described how communication between school and home worked in her situation.

‘ “when you speak to my mum, like you kind of tell me what you’re going to say before you say it. D’you get what I mean, so that’s good. Cos kids don’t like it when you talk about them and they don’t know what you are saying.’ (Nind et al., 2012, 647)

Similarly, one of the children, Sam, contrasted how she felt that staff in her old school had hated her, but in her new special school placement she felt that she was viewed positively by staff.

Overall this section of the literature review on BESD/SEMH needs and special school provision indicates that there is a significant number of children with BESD/SEMH needs who attend special schools. It also shows that outcomes for children with BESD/SEMH needs tend to be lower than their peers in terms of academic achievement. The following section will explore the different ways in which schools can work with parents to support these children.

Working with parents

‘Parents are the first and most important teachers of young children. Children grow in the contexts of families.’ (Wright and Willis, 2003, 60)

The above quote emphasises the importance of parents in the development of young people. Schools have a duty to work with parents to develop EHCPs, taking into consideration the parent thoughts on provision within the terms of the local offer (DfE/DoH, 2015). The previous government put more emphasis on the need for schools to work with parents (DfES, 2001). The first section explores the terms, parental involvement and parental engagement, in relation to a consideration of literature about the range of ways that schools and parents can work together. This is followed by sections on the importance of schools and parents working together, factors which can improve the way that schools and parents work together, and subsequently some of the barriers to parents and schools working together.

How do schools work with parents?

The literature indicates that there are two main areas that schools focus on: firstly working with parents to help to develop their children's learning skills (Harris and Goodall, 2007b); and secondly for parents to work either to support the school in terms of a governance role or fundraising for the school (Carnie, 2011). Although the literature uses the terms parental involvement and parental engagement these terms can be overlapping and are explored below. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) indicate that parental involvement and parental engagement lie on a spectrum of ways that schools and parents work together.

Parental involvement in supporting the school

According to the literature, parental involvement is a school driven activity (Ferlazzo, 2013) and is focused 'on what parents can do to support goals and agendas for the school' (Hands, 2013, 135). Goodall (2013) suggests that schools may perceive that parental involvement is the attendance of the parent at school events and consists of 'school-initiated activities, which have as their focus parental interaction with the school' (p134) with the balance of power remaining with the school. Jeynes (2012) states that parental involvement comprises a range of different activities that are initiated by the school to encourage parents to participate in their children's education, with the controlling partner being the school. Similarly, Pushor and Amendt (2018) suggest that parental involvement practices can be focused around maintaining the hierarchy of the school and being directed by the school and teachers and for the control and power to remain with the school as opposed to parents having some control. However, a different perspective can be for schools to take a greater consideration of the views of the parents and allow the parents to contribute to the way in which their child's education is managed. Schriber et al. (1999) suggest that relationships between parents and teachers can be collaborative, working together, and that this led to greater 'sharing information, expertise and power' (p39).

There may be different reasons why parents become more involved with their children's schools. Schriber et al. (1999) suggest that some parents became involved with schools to develop relationships so that they can better understand their child's progress and advocate for their child. There is also a recognition that parents can contribute knowledge about how to support their child (Hands, 2013). An alternative perspective is that parents are there to support the school in the provision of education by the parent participating in activities such as joining school trips (Drummond and Stipek, 2004); reading or volunteering in class (Leland, 2017); attending meetings at school (Jeynes, 2018; Leland, 2017) or joining the Parent Teacher Association, PTA. Similarly, Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) suggest that it is important for schools to encourage parents to participate as volunteers or work as school governors. Similarly, Schneider et al. (2007), although discussing the involvement of parents in Sure Start initiatives for pre-school children, describe the importance of involving parents in choosing the services that centres provide for their children and providing some direction in relation to activities and care. This role could be extended to the parents of older children. The different ways that parental involvement takes place can have a variety of impacts on children with monitoring homework, for example, having less of an impact on children's achievement than high expectations of success (Wilder, 2014).

[Parental engagement: schools working with parents to support children's learning at home](#)

Goodall (2013) suggests that when the parent becomes engaged in their child's learning that this can have the effect of improving the learning experience. Parental engagement is described as the process where parents become engaged with their children's learning, as opposed to being engaged with the school with 'a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014, 399). There are many ways that parents can engage with their children's learning including extra lessons, taking children to museums and supporting homework.

Jeynes (2018) describes how children complete more homework when they know that their parents are going to be checking it. In their study into how American English as a Second Language teachers can support not just the children but the whole family, Haneda and Alexander (2015) describe how one team ran workshops for immigrant parents to explain topics such as how schools work, what is expected in terms of homework and how to make reading fun. Although this can be about parents assisting or monitoring schoolwork, it is also about 'discussion, moral support and guidance' (Goodall, 2015, 174). However what teachers and parents expect in terms of parental engagement with learning does not always match, (Hands, 2009) and this mismatch of expectations can mean that parents do not always understand the way to engage with their children. To encompass all the aspects of parental involvement and parental engagement the term working with parents will be used within this thesis. This is explored in more detail in the section critique of the ways schools can work with parents.

[The impact of how parents can have an impact on children's development and opportunities for schools to develop these practices](#)

This section explores the evidence regarding how parents can implement activities which can support their child's development and increase a child's academic abilities. Some parents may lack experience of the school system and be unaware of how best to use their influence to obtain services for their children (Hamlin and Flessa, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lightfoot, 2004; Vincent, 2001) and schools could consider ways that they could assist parents to understand more ways to support their child. This section will be split into three areas: firstly, evidence for improvement in behavioural issues, secondly for improvements to literacy skills and finally for improvements in children's general academic levels or skills.

[Improvements to children's behaviour](#)

Schools and pre-schools can work with parents to develop their parenting skills to interact with their children to improve the children's behaviours. An American study by Jung (2016) found that increasing family activities for kindergarten children had a positive impact on the children's attitude to school although found

no links to an increase in reading skills. A parental style that lacks hostility can be seen to have a positive impact on behaviour (Fuligni et al., 2004). Hindman and Morrison's (2012) study of preschool children from middle class backgrounds showed that there was a link between management and discipline from parents, and child co-operation at school. This suggests that if schools can make parents aware of these links that this would give parents the opportunity to support their children by using better management at home.

Brody et al. (2004) found that a program of intervention to develop parental skills for families of adolescent children found increased positive family communication and protective factors to reduce early child involvement in sexual activity and use of alcohol. This study also showed that children who lived in disadvantaged areas were more likely to choose peers who had deviant behaviour (Brody et al., 2001). In their study of autistic children, Hebron and Humphrey (2014) found that those children who had parents who engaged with them more had experienced a reduction in the number of incidences of bullying.

Improvement to children's literacy levels

Much research shows that parents can improve their children's literacy skills for pre-school and primary children. Links can be found between parental support for learning and parental warmth towards the child and language development and cognition skills (Fuligni et al., 2004). Hindman and Morrison (2012) showed that a positive home learning environment had an impact on alphabet knowledge and decoding skills, however there was no link to increased vocabulary. Similarly, there was a marginal increase in children's vocabulary when parents participated in reading books at home (Hindman and Morrison, 2012). A study by Jung (2016) of parents of kindergarten students showed that:

'parents' levels of beliefs about their child's readiness for school and family activities had a moderate and positive impact on their children's reading achievement when their children started their kindergarten year.'(Jung, 2016, 73)

Some parents may not be aware of what children are expected to have achieved in readiness for attending school. If schools can increase parental awareness

about this then this can help parents to focus on how to prepare their children for school. Similarly, a study by Jung (2016) looking at how family attitudes and activities impact on reading skills found that parents spent more time playing with girls than with boys. The findings suggest that the amount of time spent playing had an impact on reading scores as girls in the study had higher reading scores than boys.

It has also been shown that parents can work with children to improve specific difficulties such as spelling (Lareau, 1987). The direct impact that parents can have is shown in a German study carried out by Niklas and Schneider (2015) of kindergarten children which found that there was an improvement in children's literacy when parents delivered a home literacy programme in comparison to parents who did not participate in the programme. In addition, when teachers were asked to predict future educational paths for children, those with more favourable home literacy environments were found to be predicted higher level educational paths (Niklas and Schneider, 2015). Although this is a German study it emphasises the impact that parents can have on their children's educational outcomes.

Although the activities described are ones that the parents can undertake, as previously discussed some parents may be unaware of the importance of these type of activities. It was previously noted by Sylva (2014) that children from lower socio-economic families have lower academic outcomes. It is suggested that teaching planning skills to pre-school children can improve outcomes and reduce the effect of poverty on school achievement. Schools could make parents aware of the benefits of these types of activities in supporting their children's education.

Improvements to general academic levels or skills

In a study by Dotterer and Wehrspann (2016) into how parent involvement can impact academic outcomes of urban adolescents they found that higher levels of parental involvement led to higher self-esteem in children and reduced student inattention in class. Similarly, increased communication between parent and child in terms of discussing homework and school work was found to have a moderate

effect on achievement (Hattie, 2009). Hattie and Yates (2013) also describe how children can benefit from conversations exploring past, present and future and they suggest that this can help children develop their intellectual capacity. A longitudinal study by Daniel et al. (2016) looking at parental involvement in the early years found that this had a positive impact on children's self-regulated learning. Similarly, Dotterer and Wehrspann (2016) in their study carried out in Urban Mid-West US found that parental involvement was related to an increase in Grade Point Average which measures children's progress against courses. Although from the US this study illustrates the impact parents can have on their children's academic achievement.

The above sections describe how parents can improve their children's outcomes both academically and behaviourally. This perhaps indicates that if schools can work with parents with regard to supporting their children's learning at home, then this can help children to develop a range of skills. The following section considers factors that can impact on how schools and parents work together.

Factors which may have an impact on how schools and parents can work together

The factors which can have an impact on how schools and parents work together are presented in this section. This will include factors which the literature suggests may promote and those which can be a barrier to schools working with parents.

Socio-economic status of the family

A child's socio-economic status, understood as financial resources, level of education, prestige of occupation, power and knowledge (Bomstein, 2012), may influence their academic achievement (De Graaf et al., 2000). The importance of the level of education to socio-economic status links to the importance of cultural capital. Cultural capital can be an explanation for the unequal academic success of children from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu describes cultural capital as having three elements: that of the dispositions of the mind created by the experience of having cultural capital; the material goods such as

books, pictures and instruments; and the institutionalised element whereby educational qualifications provide guarantees for the cultural capital. Goodall (2017) describes capital as ‘something one holds or possesses for the purpose of putting to use in the future’ (p46). In terms of something of benefit to children and their education this capital is a set of skills, behaviours and resources that the parent can utilise to help their child gain maximum benefit from the education system (Auerbach, 2007). This extra power that parents can use to directly affect their children’s educational provision is seen in a study carried out by Useem (1991) where parents with higher socio-economic status were better able to influence school decisions about Mathematics groups. In contrast Sheldon et al. (2010) found that children who received free school meals or subsidised school meals did less well than their peers in Mathematics assessments. Parents from higher socio-economic status may provide a wider range of out of school activities such as extra tuition, dance or arts classes (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Correspondingly, Demie et al. (2011) in their study on parent involvement in white working class families, suggest that the children may not experience a wide range of opportunities outside the home such as going to parks and the seaside, which teachers may expect them to have experienced.

Some parents may lack the confidence to speak to teachers when their own experiences of school were not positive (Carnie, 2011; Lareau, 1987; Mackety and Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008), and may find it difficult to advocate for their child. Similarly when parents have not done well at school themselves, they may feel that they do not have the skills to help their children with their homework (Drummond and Stipek, 2004). Some parents may have had poor previous experiences with the schools their children attend. They may then perceive that contact from the school will mean that their child is in trouble. Heinrichs (2018) describes how she phoned parents to invite them to a coffee morning when she recently started at the school as a new teacher. She was met with the following response:

‘ “Are you calling because my son/daughter is in trouble? Why do you want to speak with me?” ’ (Heinrichs, 2018, 195)

Heinrichs perceived this as a lack of relationship between the school and parents. White and Levers (2016) suggest that this lack of a positive relationship can be identified where some parents felt unwelcome in the school and lacked confidence in contacting the school or attending school events. They suggest that this may be exacerbated if the parents' own experiences of school had been less positive, suggesting that they are less likely to become involved with schools. Also, parental attendance at parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom and in attendance at open house events in a study carried out by Lareau (1987) were found to be significantly higher in schools where the majority of parents were from a higher socio-economic status. The study also found that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds communicated less with teachers and on less academic issues; contact with parents from a lower socio-economic status focused on issues around lunch and playtime in comparison with parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds who tended to focus more on academic progress. Lareau and Horvat (1999) suggest that parents' cultural capital with the school is increased when they work with the school in a way that is compliant with dominant standards in school interactions. In their American study into parental involvement of black parents of third grade pupils, these authors describe one parent as the 'most supportive and helpful parent' (Lareau and Horvat, 1999, 45) when they conformed to the culturally expected norms of parental involvement asking for their daughter to be tested for the gifted programme and regularly checking on their daughter's progress. However, when a second family challenged the school on racist behaviour the school perceived the parents as being difficult. Although parents in both cases were expressing concern about aspects of their children's education, school staff interpreted this differently depending on whether the parent used the cultural norms of the staff. This aligns with the point made by Crozier (2001), who noted that teachers are often white and middle class and do not always appreciate the way parents are able to be involved with schools.

The impact of different backgrounds

Auerbach (2007) explains that the culture of schools may not be the same as that of the parents and where this happens school staff may not be aware of and 'do not address the sense of exclusion that some parents feel at schools' (p253). This

is supported by Crozier (2001) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) who, as noted above, emphasise that often white, middle class teachers do not always appreciate the way in which parents are able to be involved in schools. This can be exacerbated when parents do not have the same first language as that used in the school or the same cultural background, making it difficult to communicate with schools (Auerbach, 2007; Daniel-White, 2002; Leland, 2017) and therefore to become fully involved in the school. Families who have a different culture or language to the mainstream culture in the school may be excluded from participation in some parent school activities (Feiler et al., 2006; Wright and Willis, 2003). White (2002) in his research with a Latin-American family indicates that if children are taught in English, parents who do not speak English are unable to help the children with their homework. However, Lareau and Horvat (1999) suggest that race may have a significant impact on the willingness of parents and schools to interact, more so than social class or poverty in terms of parental engagement. They describe an example of a mother's dissatisfaction with the school because they celebrated traditional 'white' festivals such as Halloween, but the school choose not to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday, with the mother feeling that her concerns were ignored on racial grounds.

Parents from different cultural backgrounds may not be aware of how a specific education system works and therefore may not be able to support their children to make the best use of the system (Daniel-White, 2002; Haneda and Alexander, 2015; Lareau, 1987; Wright and Willis, 2003). As previously described, there are a range of practices that parents can undertake to support a child's academic achievement. However, if the parents are unaware of these practices or expectations of the school, the child may attend school at a disadvantage compared to the children whose parents who were aware of these practices. Lareau (1987), in her review of parental involvement in schools more than 30 years ago, found that the social background of parents had a large impact on the way that parents interacted with schools. As noted earlier, she describes how parents from a working-class background contacted schools less often, and on non-academic matters. This was compared to the contact made by parents at a second school where families were generally from a higher social background

and contact was more frequent and on more academic topics. This impacts on children as 'schools utilise particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula' (Lareau, 1987, 74) which children from families with backgrounds that use similar patterns will find it easier to negotiate. Whilst this review was carried out in the USA, it is relevant for this thesis because it shows the ways that parents from different social groups interact with parents.

As in the earlier discussion, a greater proportion of children who receive statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH needs in England, come from a low socio-economic background compared to children with other SEN. As parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to work with schools, then they are less likely to engage in practices which would support their children's academic development than parents whose background is similar to the school's predominant culture.

School factors which may impact on the way they work with parents

The previous sections identified issues which can make it more difficult for parents to work with schools. However, there are factors that can help to develop home school relationships. This section will focus on school factors, initially looking at the importance of leadership and the different aspects that leadership can contribute. It then considers the culture of the school as regards working with parents and finally other practical difficulties that can be a barrier to parents and schools working together.

The role of leadership can have an important influence on the development of a culture where schools work with parents in a positive way. School leaders can define the culture of a school (Findon and Johnston-Wilder, 2018), which influences the vision of a school and the direction that it will follow. Day et al (2010) state that head teachers are:

'perceived to be the main source of leadership by key school staff. Their educational values, reflective strategies and leadership practices shape the internal processes and pedagogies that result in improved pupil outcomes.' (Day et al., 2010, 3)

The following section will explore how the attitudes of head teachers and their approach to working with parents may determine the approach of the whole staff with respect to working with parents. As Goodall (2018a) suggests:

‘School leaders are best placed to support the change in beliefs and ethos within their school.’(p144)

Thus, whether a school works with parents or tends to exclude parents can be determined by the Head teacher’s views on the importance of working with parents:

‘for many parents, whether or not they feel welcome or unwelcome within the school community is significantly shaped by the ways in which the school principal exercises inclusive leadership with and on behalf of parents.’(Barr and Saltmarsh, 2014, 492)

Although Barr and Saltmarsh do not define inclusive leadership, they seem to mean that they see parents as part of the team that work together to support a child in school.

‘A genuinely collaborative approach towards parents was seen to be fostered from the top and communicated personally by the principal.’
(p496)

Some school teachers see parents through the lens of a deficit model, where teachers perceive parents as needing guidance as to how to help their children (Auerbach, 2009; de Ruiter, 2008; Nakagawa, 2000) and not as an asset that can be used to help to support children (Auerbach, 2009). In such cases, it is suggested that school leaders have to take the lead in changing the culture of a school to value the role of parents in their children’s learning and ensure this is recognised by teachers (Goodall, 2018a). They also need, it is argued, to be systematic in changing the culture of schools (Pushor and Amendt, 2018). Findings from one particular school leader during interviews carried out with school leaders who had been identified as being proactive in their school’s journey to parental engagement by Auerbach (2009), emphasised that school leaders need to take ownership of parental engagement and lead the process or else it would be unsuccessful.

School culture of wanting to work with parents

Staff and parents may have different expectations of the role that each plays in parental engagement (Keyes, 2002). According to Goodall (2018b) teachers can make an effort to bridge such a gap by respecting parents and understanding that they will each bring different contributions to the way they work together to support the child.

As previously described, a school may find it difficult to get parents to attend parents' evenings or other events and this may be because parents feel excluded from the school due to lack of respect from staff based on cultural differences (de Ruiter, 2008). Heinrichs (2018) describes how, in her role as Vice Principal in a Canadian School with mostly aboriginal students, she sought to understand the culture and history of her students' families. Her purpose was to create opportunities for staff to also understand the children's cultural background and be able to gain a greater understanding of the lives of the families and adapt their own practices to help parents to engage with school more. Heinrichs (2018) wanted to show the parents that she valued them by making an effort to meet the parents in the school. She relates:

‘I baked something fresh each week and I used a beautiful table cloth on the conference room table to make our gathering more welcoming and hospitable. (p195)

By acting as a role model and showing respect for the culture of the families, Heinrich was able to demonstrate to staff that it was important to work with parents and to show the contributions that the parents could make. Thus, although this is a Canadian study it shows that, the leadership in a school can determine how the culture of the school can develop in relation to how staff perceive the role of parents and how staff work with parents.

Watt (2016) described how schools found ways to invite parents into school via events such as making Christmas crackers or Easter bonnets that encouraged parents to be in the school when perhaps they were reluctant to be there. Watt (2016) suggests that these events might include small mini teaching events with the teacher modelling reading a book and asking questions of the children to

demonstrate this to parents in a non-threatening way. Barton et al. (2004) describe how a mother who initially did not engage with school was made to feel welcome by one specific member of staff. This initial step led the mother to participate in other activities within the school and develop her abilities to advocate for her child. In this study, the importance of regular communication via texts, meetings and discussions at the school gate was found to be an important way to build relationships (Watt, 2016). Many children at special schools live some distance from their school and therefore travel by taxi this shows that special schools need to make extra efforts to encourage parents to become involved with schools.

Practical difficulties

There may, however, be practical difficulties regarding why some parents find it difficult to attend meetings and events at schools. Studies have noted a number of these. Some parents may find it difficult to attend schools for meetings due to the time when the meetings are scheduled. Parents may find that their work patterns clash and prevent attendance at times of meetings during the school day (Carnie, 2011; Hands, 2013; Mackety and Linder-VanBerschot, 2008). Issues with getting child care may make it difficult to attend school meetings for some parents (Auerbach, 2006; Carnie, 2011; Hands, 2013; Mackety and Linder-VanBerschot, 2008). In addition some parents may have trouble attending school events due to transport issues (Carnie, 2011; Hands, 2013; Mackety and Linder-VanBerschot, 2008). Some parents may have a lack of access to the technology that schools use for emails or websites (Springate et al., 1999). It is suggested that schools and teachers can choose to adapt their practices to make it easier for parents to engage with them (Goodall, 2018b); examples of this could be the provision of childcare at events (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Although most of these studies refer to mainstream schools, for special schools which are the focus which are the focus of this thesis, where children come from a wider geographical area, some of these difficulties may be increased for some parents.

[Summary of research into working with parents](#)

This section has explored some of the different ways that schools can work with parents. The benefits of schools working with parents, to the schools and to the

children have been highlighted. Factors which may act as barriers for schools in working with parents have been considered. Some of these factors are within the control of the school, and in particular the role of the senior leaders can influence the school to develop a culture that values importance of working with parents. Finally, it was considered how the school needs to develop a culture of wanting to work with parents and developing practices that support this.

The final section focuses on the brevity of research in this specific field of interest about special schools for children aged 11-16 years working with the parents of the children attending their schools.

Special schools for children aged 11-16 years with BESD/SEMH needs working with parents

This exact focus of this thesis on how special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents seems to be very rarely the focus of research. A search was conducted using the Education Research Complete database. The key search terms used were: 'special school' and 'parent' and 'sebd or social emotional behavioural difficulties or semh or social emotional and behavioural difficulties or ebd or besd or behavioural emotional and social difficulties' to be found in the abstract of the document. This produced 10 documents and the abstract for each of the articles were read. It was found that only one of the articles, written by Margraf and Piquart (2018) considered adolescents in special schools with emotional and behavioural needs alongside aspects of parenting. A list of these articles is found in appendix 2.1 and includes a brief note as to why each article was not included as part of this research. This study examined the impact of maternal behaviours on children and suggested that parent programmes could influence the mother's behaviour which in turn would impact on the child's behaviour. Although close to the current study topic, it is not directly about the ways that special schools for secondary aged children with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents. This shows that there is a gap in the knowledge in this area and why it has been chosen for the focus of this study.

The research questions are detailed in the methodology, which will explain the design, implementation and analysis of the research undertaken.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

Within the literature review it was noted that a number of research papers examined individual specific projects to investigate how a specific school or project team worked with parents. From my own experience I was aware that there are usually many ways of working with parents within one school and a part of my motivation was to find new ways of working with parents for my own school. The aim of this research project was to examine the wide range of different activities that individual special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs undertake to work with parent/carers. This led to the development of these research questions:

1. What do maintained or non-maintained special schools for children aged 11-16 years with BESD/SEMH in England do to work with parent/carers of children with BESD/SEMH?
2. What influences the decisions about how these schools choose to work with parent/carers?
3. How do the schools arrive at decisions about what works well?
4. What criteria do schools use to evaluate whether a practice works well?
5. What barriers have schools found to working with the parent/carers of children with BESD/SEMH aged 11-16 years?
6. Are there any characteristics of schools which influence the practices that they use to work with parents?

This chapter will explain how the research project was designed, implemented and data collected, analysed and the ethical considerations for the project.

Research design

The research design incorporated a mixed methods approach whereby both quantitative and qualitative data is collected (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This enabled me to examine the different practices that schools state that they use to work with parents and to see if there are characteristics of schools which can be linked to specific practices. The aim at the outset of collecting both quantitative data and qualitative data was to determine if there were practices that were effective in schools with particular characteristics, for example urban schools tended to use a particular approach more than rural schools. The plan was for

these approaches to be followed up in the interviews to explore the practices greater depth. The research project was designed with two phases: first an internet-based survey to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on the way that schools for children aged 11-16 with a statement for BESD, at the time of data collection this was the category used by the DfE for data collection, worked with parent/carers. The second phase was designed to use interviews to gather qualitative data with staff and parent/carers from schools for children with a statement for BESD. As part of the first phase participants were asked if they were willing to participate in an interview to provide more detailed data. The second phase of the research project was then a deeper investigation into the ways that schools work with parent/carers. Figure 3.1 shows how the phases and research processes were organised.

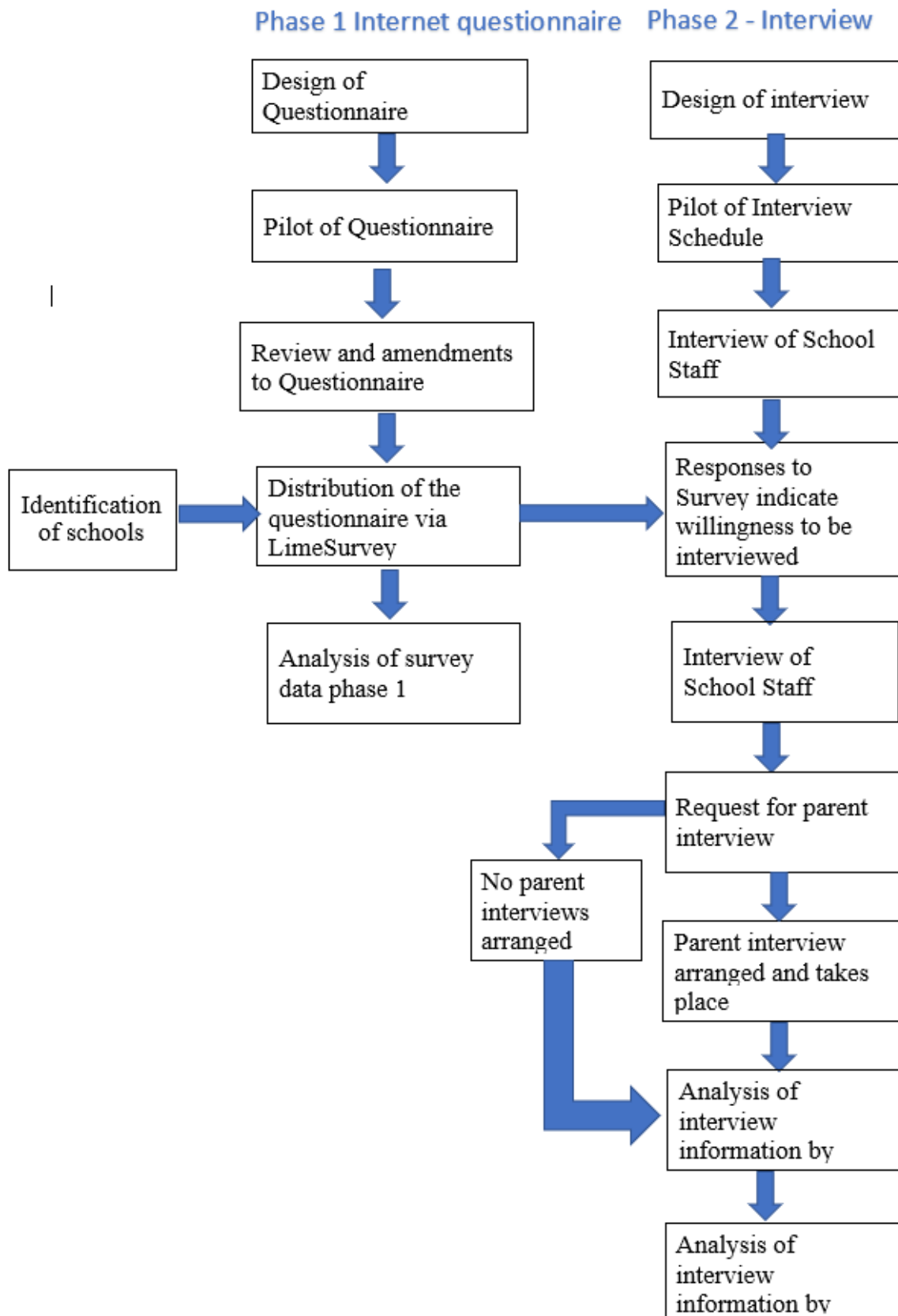


Figure 3.1 Research design and processes

Research Questions	Phase one internet- based survey	Phase two Interview with staff and parents
1. What do maintained or non-maintained special schools for children aged 11-16 years with BESD/SEMH in England do to work with parent/carers of children with BESD/SEMH?	✓	✓
2. What influences the decisions about how these schools choose to work with parent/carers?		✓
3. How do the schools arrive at decisions about what works well?		✓
4. What criteria do schools use to evaluate whether a practice works well?	✓	
5. What barriers have schools found to working with the parent/carers of children with BESD/SEMH aged 11-16 years?	✓	✓
6. Are there any characteristics of schools which influence the practices that they use to work with parents?	✓	✓

Table 3.1 Research questions' distribution over the internet-based survey and the interviews.

Phase one: internet-based survey

Phase one was designed as a cross-sectional survey of special schools, for children aged between 11 and 16 years with a statement of SEN for BESD, to investigate the ways that schools work with the parent/carers of these children.

Justification of choice of a survey as a research tool.

A survey is a means to collect data (Cohen et al., 2018; Fowler Jr, 2013). Surveys can be telephone based (Robson and McCartan, 2016), online (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Thomas, 2017), by focus groups (Robson and McCartan, 2016), or face-to-face interviews (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The purpose can be to collect numerical data (Fowler Jr, 2013). Within this project the initial aim was to

examine if schools with particular characteristics such as geographic location, gender of pupils, age range of pupils found particular practices were more useful at helping the school work with parents. The survey data can also be used to find out if there are relationships between key characteristics (Cohen et al., 2018). The choice to use a survey in the first phase of this research was driven by the advantage that surveys can allow for a large sample size. It was expected that a large sample could result in the collection of data from schools from different locations: urban, suburban or rural, as well as boys only schools compared to schools catering for boys and girls or girls only schools, and schools providing for different age ranges 5-16 years or 11-16 years. The size of the sample of all schools that matched the criteria, specified in the research questions (i.e. maintained and non-maintained special schools for children aged 11-16 years with BESD/SEMH in England – 270 schools) meant that carrying out interviews in all schools would not be a practical way to gather data due to the limitations of a single researcher project. However, one of the major problems with a survey can be a poor sample size (OECD, 2012). All schools that met the criteria were contacted to try to reduce this effect. Further details of procedures and methods used to try to maximise the response rate are described in the section on the questionnaire, distribution and response rate later in this chapter.

Dillman et al. (2014), referring to internet-based surveys, suggest that a survey can allow for a range of different questions and can be used to find out how attitudes vary across different characteristics of the group. This would allow a comparison of schools with different characteristics regarding location of schools, rural, sub-urban or urban; or gender of pupils or age range of pupils 5-16 years, or 11-16 years or 11- 16+ years. A disadvantage of a survey is that it can lead to a lack of depth of coverage of a topic (BERA, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). This study aimed to provide a review of the different methods and practices that schools use to work with the parents/carers in the first phase with phase two exploring in greater detail and depth how the different methods developed and how they were evaluated.

The next section explores the advantages and disadvantages of using an internet-based survey over a postal survey or interview.

Internet-based survey - advantages and disadvantages

Advantages of using an internet-based survey.

One of the advantages of using internet-based research is in providing cost savings for the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018; Weimiao Fan and Yan, 2010) as surveys can be distributed by email which is effectively cost free and immediate. Also, as the respondents input data directly into an online form removing the time that the researcher would need to spend inputting data. Fowler Jr (2013) suggests that the use of internet-based surveys can give time for the respondent to give more considered answers and can have generally high response rates. The LimeSurvey package was used for the questionnaire as this was the recommended University of Exeter tool at the time of the research. This allowed for all responses to be anonymised so that to allow respondents could be more open in their responses and they would be free from the issue of desire to please the researcher, as might be more problematic in an interview.

Disadvantages of using an internet-based survey

Cohen et al. (2018) emphasise that not all individuals may have access to the internet. Lack of internet access could cause a biased response if there is a section of the population that do not have access to the internet which would be a disadvantage if only a proportion of the sample could be invited to participate. However, all the proposed participants worked in a school in England and each school in the overall sample had a website (this was accessed to identify the age range of the pupils at the school and to collect details of email addresses). Therefore, lack of access to the internet was unlikely to be an issue in this study, as schools in England almost universally have access to email (Fowler Jr, 2013). Cohen et al. (2018) describe participants having the ability to make multiple responses as a disadvantage of internet-based surveys; however, within LimeSurvey the use of a 'token' linked to each invitation email prevented multiple responses from the same source.

A further disadvantage of using an internet survey that Cohen et al. (2018) identified is the lack of ability to clarify the meaning of questions or clarify anything the respondent feels uncertain about. Piloting the questionnaire in this study was designed to reduce this concern. In retrospect, however, only used staff from the researchers own school took part in the pilot and therefore there may have been a common understanding of the key terms. In retrospect, an individual from a different school should be used to pilot a survey in order to gain a different perspective.

A limitation of online surveys is that they may have lower response rates than postal surveys (Campbel et al., 2008; Fan and Yan, 2010). However, this was balanced against the time required by the researcher to create postal surveys and input data and the additional costs of posting the surveys meant that an internet-based survey was chosen. To attempt to reduce the possible effect of this limitation, as noted earlier, all schools in the potential population of special schools providing for children with BESD/SEMH were invited to participate in the survey rather than just a sample.

Questionnaire design

The overall aim of the survey phase, as previously stated, was to investigate the ways that special schools, for children aged between 11 and 16 years with a statement of SEN for BESD, work with parents/carers. More specifically, the aims were to find out about: the different activities that schools used to work with parents; how successful the schools felt these were; and what methods they used to evaluate the activities and any barriers that they found to working with parents. The survey was designed using the LimeSurvey package which invites the respondent to access the survey through an email link. A copy of the invitation email used in this study can be found in appendix 3.1; the email included an opt out link so that those who actively did not want to participate were able to choose not to be contacted again.

Two specific aspects of the questionnaire design are important to describe and discuss: the layout of the survey and the questions asked, their format and order.

The survey was designed to be quite short with the aim that it could be completed in under 15 minutes; it was hoped that this might help to increase the response rate (Dillman et al., 2014).

Layout and presentation of survey

The use of colour and graphics in an internet-based survey may make it more visually inviting (Cohen et al., 2018) but this can make the file size very large which may increase the time it takes for the file to download on the computer (Cohen et al., 2018; Dillman et al., 2014). This may cause the recipient to give up or cause the computer to freeze or to crash, so colour was not used in the design of the survey in this study to minimise the risk of crashing.

The initial page of the questionnaire was an informed consent page which had to be completed before participants could pass to the next question (see appendix 3.2). The questions were set out on one extended scrolling page so participants could see the length of the questionnaire, with the hope that they would see the questionnaire was quite straightforward to complete and would not be too time consuming.

Questions

The questions were designed to have a range of different formats to maintain the interest of the respondents, including multiple-choice, short answer with room for a few words or space for longer descriptions. Dillman et al. (2014) describe how when someone is completing a question by hand, the eyes and hands are focused in the same area, whereas in an internet-based survey the eyes are focused on the screen, but the hands are focused on the mouse or keyboard. This splitting of focus increases the level of difficulty of the question; however, this can be mitigated to some extent using multiple-choice style answers for a question, and this was implemented for the initial questions in the survey.

The initial questions, 1 through to 5, were multiple-choice or drop-down menus to gain basic data about the schools: age range of pupils; whether most of the pupils came from the school's own local authority or from other local authorities;

percentage of pupils with SEBD/SEMH; gender of pupils with SEBD/SEMH, and location of school, in terms of whether they were rural, suburban or urban. The interest in the location was generated from personal experience of teaching in a rural school where children travelled long distances to school and therefore led an interest in whether the distance that children lived from school would have an impact on the way that the school worked with parents/carers. Similarly, there was a possibility that schools with a wider age range of pupils, for example, from 5-16 years, might have different practices to schools that only provided for children aged between 11 and 16 years of age. Question 6 was a multiple-choice question where respondents could indicate from a list the different ways that they worked with schools, selecting none, some or all. The list was developed from the literature review and from the researcher's own experience of how schools work with parents. The next set of questions focused on the main practice that the school used, trying to explore one practice from each school in some detail (there was a later opportunity, question 22, for the school to describe other practices). These questions, seven through to fourteen, were free text questions to name the main practice that the schools used to work with parents/carers, and the aims of this practice and how successful the school perceived itself to be at achieving these aims. They also allowed for a description of who in the school designed the practice, and who delivered the practice, as well as timescales and numbers of parents involved in this practice. Questions 15 to 20 were about the perception of success and ways that the school evaluated the success of the practices. Questions 21 and 22 gave the participants the opportunity to add any additional details that they felt were relevant and any other methods that they had used to work with parents/carers. Question 23 asked if the respondents had used any methods that they felt had been particularly unsuccessful for working with parents/carers. Question 24 was a request for contact details if the participant was willing to be interviewed.

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that high levels of compulsory questions reduce the response rate for a questionnaire, therefore there were few compulsory questions, only questions 1 to 6 and these were multiple-choice, drop down lists or short answer questions, and all other questions were optional. The hope was

that if respondents were unable to complete the whole survey, they might at least complete to question seven, although this was not explicitly mentioned. This did not occur and respondents either completed most of the survey, or made no response, or only completed the consent page.

Pilot

Piloting a survey enables the researcher to test the time it takes for participants to complete the survey as well as checking that the layout and wording of the questions is clear, gaining feedback from pilot participants and adapting questions where necessary (Cohen et al., 2018). It enables the researcher to consider technical implementation of the research instrument and to consider if the questions asked enabled the respondents to provide data to answer the research questions.

The questionnaire was piloted in the researcher's own school, which is a school similar in type to those targeted in the survey, to check that it would provide the data being sought and to check the usability of the instrument. Three members of the senior leadership team and a therapist were asked to complete the questionnaire. The aim was that in the research project the school SENCO would be contacted for completion of the internet-based survey. Individuals with senior leadership roles were asked to pilot the questionnaire, as the researcher had the role of SENCO for the school at that time and to record the length of time it took them to complete the questionnaire. The research pilot participants were asked to then take part in a short discussion to consider whether the questions were understandable, the sequence was logical, and to confirm that the questionnaire was neither personal, intrusive nor at a high level of difficulty. As noted earlier, Dillman and Smyth (2014) point out possible issues regarding file size which can cause computers to 'freeze' or 'crash'; piloting the survey with different staff members enabled the survey to be tested on several different machines to see if it caused any technical difficulties. All four completed the questionnaire to various degrees. However, one needed several reminders, which suggested to me that time would need to be built in to the project for reminder emails to prompt responses. Another participant delegated it to an administrative member of staff,

indicating that even when the email was addressed to a specific individual it may not necessarily be completed by this person. A third individual did complete the questionnaire but merely filled in each section with aa, bb, cc etc. as if to check that the actual process worked; when asked this individual said that they were very busy and thought that this response would be sufficient. Overall this showed that collecting the data via this method may have a low response rate, as previously noted, and therefore this determined that the whole population of potential schools was contacted rather than just a sample of schools.

When responses were given, this indicated the data that was consistent with expectations to answer the research questions. No substantial changes were made after pilot participant feedback although some grammatical and spelling errors were corrected.

Participants: schools and intended respondents

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that increasing the sample when it is non-homogenous can increase the validity of the study, as the schools that were contacted were a non-homogenous group⁷. In an attempt to maximise the number of respondents in phase one all the schools which met the criteria of being a special school with a categorisation for children aged 11-16 with a statement of SEN for BESD in England were contacted. The list of schools was identified from the Statistical First Release Special Educational Needs in England: January 2014 Underlying data: SFR26/2014 (DfE, 2014c). This led to an initial list of 518 schools. The websites of all 518 schools were viewed to reduce this list according to the following criteria:

- special school with a categorisation of BESD.
- age range of pupils either between 5-16 years or 11-16 years, to exclude schools that catered only for primary age students, as the focus was on how schools work with pupils aged 11-16.

⁷ Schools could have different characteristics in terms of gender: pupils: boys only girls only or mixed; age range, in terms of age range 5-16 years or 11-16 years. Schools could come from rural, sub-urban or urban environments and could have different percentages of students with statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH.

- maintained schools or non-maintained schools to exclude independent schools as these have significantly different funding schemes, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

Schools can apply to educate children from different categories of SEN and may be able to take children from several different categories. The decision was made to only include schools where more than 5% of students had a primary SEN categorised as BESD. This led to a further criterion

- More than 5% of the pupils at the school had a primary SEN of BESD.

This process reduced the number of schools to 270.

The participants for the research project were staff who worked at the schools that met this criterion noted above. Contact details were found from each website for the best member of staff to approach, SENCO or head teacher. On most occasions, there was no details of how to contact specific staff; in these cases, whatever details were available on the website were used. The email contact from the school websites usually took the form of admin@school.sch.uk or head@school.sch.uk as opposed to an individual email address, although this was used when it was given. On some school websites no contact email address was identifiable; when this lack of contact details occurred, schools were phoned to ask for a contact email address. On each occasion when phone calls were made the answer was always send it to 'admin@....'. Due to the anonymity of the surveys it is not possible to identify whether the schools with no contact email address responded to the survey to see if this group worked in a different way. The researcher's own school met the selection criteria for the sample and was thus one of the 270 schools approached, the head teacher was asked to name an individual who was subsequently invited to participate in the survey. The individual who participated had not been a participant in the pilot for the survey.

Questionnaire distribution and response

The survey (see appendix 3.2) was distributed using LimeSurvey software to send an email (appendix 3.1) to the 270 recipients. Dillman and Smyth (2014) state that an increased response rate can be achieved by multiple contact attempts and varying the timing of the survey. Cohen et al. (2018) stress the importance of reducing or removing the incidence of multiple responses to a survey. LimeSurvey achieves this by having a 'token based' response system

which allows each respondent to only complete the survey once. This would prevent multiple responses from one school if the email with the link to the survey was forwarded to several people in the same school. Anonymity of the user is also provided by the 'token based' system, the tokens are automatic and require no input from the user.

A follow-up contact was made three weeks later, again using LimeSurvey to send an email (see Appendix 3.3). As part of the initial email, recipients were given an 'opt out' link which would prevent any further contact for the survey and any follow-up emails to prevent irritation to individuals. These two approaches generated a total of 40 responses, although in some cases the respondents had not answered more than the consent question. As the time was approaching the end of term, when school staff can be very busy it was decided to wait until the new school year to send a further third follow up; this resulted in a further 26 responses bringing the total to 66 responses. Dillman and Smyth (2014) suggest that it is beneficial to use different means of contacting respondents; however the small scale of the project meant that it was not possible to fund paper-based surveys, as previously noted, and due to the researcher's role as a full-time teacher it was not possible to follow up with phone reminders in school working time.

The opt-out function was used by 12 respondents in either the initial or follow up emails; due to the anonymity function it was not clear if the individuals who had opted out had opened the survey and chosen not to complete it or had not even opened it. Some of the responses had little or no detail in them. Consent was given to collect data in 36 cases, but no further responses were given; these were therefore not used. 25 questionnaires were fully completed and a further five were partially completed; both completed and partially completed questionnaires were included in the data set, giving a total of 30 questionnaires. The response rate was therefore 30 out of 270, (11%). For these 30 respondents, when the results were examined further, seven had indicated that they only taught primary age children. This would appear to indicate that there was some inaccuracies in the

website information or researcher error. This further reduced the number of useable responses to 23. See Table 3.2 for details.

	Number
Total number of questionnaires distributed	270
Total number of responses	66
Questionnaires with responses to fewer than two questions	36
Total number of questionnaires with complete or mostly complete responses	30
Number of questionnaires from schools in the appropriate age range	23

Table 3.2 Response to the internet-based survey

Percentage of pupils with BESD/SEMH	Number of Schools
Less than 10%	0
10 to 20%	2
20 to 40%	0
40-60%	0
60-80%	1
80-90%	1
Greater than 90%	18
Did not answer	1
Total	23

Table 3.3 Percentage of pupils attending the responding schools with a statement of SEN for BESD

An examination of the responses (see Table 3.3) showed that most of the responding schools (18 of the 23 responses) had greater than 90% of pupils attending having BESD. The other responses were: one in the 80-90% range, one in the 60-80% range, and two in the 10-20% range, and one did not answer. The lack of response rates from schools with lower percentages of pupils with BESD/SEMH may be because the introductory email made it clear that the author was interested specifically in the arrangements for working with parents/carers of children with BESD/SEMH. At the time of distribution of the internet-based survey the term BESD/SEMH was used throughout the questionnaire and may have made individuals who work in schools with children with a broader range of special needs feel that the survey was not aimed at them. For schools with lower percentages of children with BESD, and thus consequently higher proportions of

children whose primary SEN was other than BESD, this may have been a disincentive to participate in the survey and these schools may possibly have felt that they were not the target audience for this survey. On the first statistical release Special Educational Needs (DfE, 2014c) at the time of the study, there were 146 schools with greater than 90% of pupils having BESD as their primary special need, thus the response rate for such schools was 18 out of this possible total of 146 schools which suggests a very slightly higher response rate of 12% for these schools. This was low compared to the study by Baruch and Holtom (2008) looked at the response rates of 1607 articles in academic journals which found that for individuals the average response rate was 52.7 % and the standard deviation was 20.4.

Data analysis

LimeSurvey allocates each returned survey a number, in this case 1-66. As noted earlier, 23 responses were useable, and it was decided to use a letter-based system rather than names for the schools at this stage of the analysis. Therefore, each school was randomly allocated a letter A to W and these are used to indicate the schools throughout phase one. The analysis of the questionnaire data involved three parts: initially to consider the situations of the respondents; secondly to compare the way the different groupings of respondents used particular methods of working with parents/carers; and, finally to examine the free text answers.

The initial part of the data analysis considered the types of schools that respondents to the survey attended in relation to of location (urban, suburban or rural), age range of pupils (5-16 or 11-16), gender of pupils (boys only, girls only or both boys and girls), and percentage of pupils with a statement for BESD. The survey had a very small response rate, and it was decided not to pursue a detailed statistical analysis to show the basic details. The numbers of respondents for the different questions is given in the findings section.

The second part of the analysis considered if there was any correlation between factors such as the location of the school or the percentage of children with

BESD/SEMH determined and the responses given in answer to question 6 in terms of methods the schools used to work with parents. With the small number of respondents, cross comparison of very specific groups, i.e. considering if boys' schools in rural areas were more likely to use a particular practice than boys' schools in urban areas, was considered inappropriate.

Ethics: phase one

In educational research the consideration of ethics has become an integral part of the process (Cohen et al., 2018). This project was approved by the University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee. The ethics form can be found in appendix 3.4.

One aspect of the role of ethics is to make researchers focus on the impact of their research on the participants in their study.

‘Educational researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants, they have a responsibility to participants to act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings.’ (Cohen et al., 2018,112)

The nature of this specific research project was designed not to be harmful or cause distress to respondents. The aim of phase one was to find out what practices the schools used to work with parents/carers, not to find out any private or personal information nor to share this information within the school, with families or local authorities. The survey was sent via email, was clearly from a student at the University of Exeter and contact details for supervisors were given. This should have provided participants with a degree of confidence that the survey was part of an academic research project. There was also no compulsion on respondents to participate. The anonymity of the survey also reduced the possibility of the respondents feeling the need to produce socially acceptable or desirable answers.

A concern for any project is to gain the informed consent of participants (Cohen et al., 2018). The initial email (appendix 3.1) informed the recipient about the

project and the question about consent was the first question and was a compulsory question. The LimeSurvey tool was designed so that data was not collected unless consent was given. The participants were made aware that the data collected would be used in an anonymous format for a doctoral study and possibly presented at conferences or published in an academic journal. They were also made aware that once submitted, the data would not be able to be identified or removed from the survey. The data collected by the LimeSurvey database is anonymised and all date stamps removed so that it is not possible to link survey responses to individual schools. If the participant had agreed to be contacted, for an interview these details were stored separately from the survey in a secure location and then the details removed from the survey to provide anonymity. The issue of what the respondents might themselves gain from the study, reciprocity (Cohen et al., 2018), was approached through the statement that a summary of the different ways that schools described working with parents/carers would be distributed to all 270 schools contacted in the project. This will be prepared and distributed in spring 2020.

Quality of survey data

The research quality for phase one of this study is discussed below in terms of validity and generalisability

Validity of data can be described as whether an instrument is measuring what it claims to measure (King and Horrocks, 2010). Fowler Jr (2013) highlights one issue that some respondents may answer questions incorrectly for a variety of reasons. Respondents may not answer correctly because they have a perception of the answer that the interviewer wants to hear (Fowler Jr, 2013). A further reason could be that respondents might be mistaken in their perception of what happened in a situation. Within this project this could be that the individual responding is not aware of the full picture, perhaps being under the impression that activities take place regularly and may be unaware of other activities that take place. There may also be a problem with respondents understanding the question in different ways (Fowler Jr, 2013). Within this project this is possible in relation to some of the questions – for example, the question ‘How did you

measured the effectiveness of the project' could result in a description of methods or the categories of success that the school used to measure success. A further example might relate to participant understanding of the phrase 'working with parent/carers'.

Sampling error, where the respondents to the survey do not reflect the population as a whole, might be introduced (Fowler Jr, 2013) which could affect the generalisability of the data. Participation within phase one of the study was entirely voluntary and therefore might introduce this type of sampling limitation. The people who responded, for example, may be those who felt their school had a strength in working with parents/carers. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise the findings from this study to all schools that provide an education for children with a statement of BESD aged 11-16 years.

Another disadvantage of a survey (OECD, 2012) is that it is possible that poorly worded questions can cause respondents to fail to understand questions and this may mean that the respondents give inaccurate answers. To mitigate this effect, the internet-based survey was piloted, and the pilot did not indicate any issues that would lead to a lack of understanding. This 'term' was not specifically defined within the project as it is used in many government documents for example the Lamb Inquiry (2009). This was deliberate as the intention was to find out what schools do to work with parent/carers.

Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that making a survey anonymous increases the honesty of the respondents. Individuals may choose not to answer honestly if they feel that their answers will cause them harm in some way (Cohen et al., 2018). An example of this is that school staff may feel compelled, or consider it desirable, to state that they contact parents every week, when it could be once a term; the anonymity of the internet-based survey should reduce this source of error. To ensure that the survey was anonymous, as stated earlier, the LimeSurvey product was used which removed all identifiable data. The initial email and introduction to the survey both stated that the data would be

anonymised once submitted and as part of the consent information it was explained to participants that once submitted the data would not be identifiable. An issue of concern was whether the answers of respondents would be the same as for non-respondents (Cohen et al., 2018). One method which can be used to try to tackle this issue is to increase the number of respondents. As detailed earlier, efforts were made to try to increase the response rate. The low response rate causes a challenge to the generalisability of these practices described by the respondents to the survey. The non-responders do not invalidate the response that there are activities taking place in some special schools for children with BESD/SEMH which are not documented in the literature. Their absence, however, means that it cannot be determined if these are isolated incidents of ways of working with parents/carers or common occurrences.

Phase two interviews with staff and parents

For phase two, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff and some parents/carers to examine the ways that schools work with parents in more depth and understand how the schools worked with parents. The following sections describe the justification for interviews as a method, the interview design process, how the participants were selected, how the interviews were implemented, and the data analysed.

Semi-structured interview – justification and advantages and disadvantages

Interviews as a means of data collection can enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences from their own point of view (Cohen et al., 2018; Mann, 2016) and can enable greater light to be shown on a particular phenomenon. In this study, it was possible to ask more detailed questions about issues that had been raised by the survey and to ask parents/carers about practices that the school staff had described in their interview.

Robson (2002) states that one of the benefits of using semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection is that it allows the researcher to follow up points

of interest. The semi-structured nature enables the researcher to probe in order to gain greater depth of detail on an issue (Cohen et al., 2018; Galletta, 2013); it thus has greater flexibility than a structured interview (King and Horrocks, 2010). A semi-structured interview, with mostly open-ended questions, was chosen as it allowed for more 'probing and clarification' (Mann, 2016, 102) than a structured interview but more control than in an unstructured interview. Galletta (2013) explains that a benefit of a semi-structured interview is that it allows the interviewer to create openings for the participant to describe their experiences whilst allowing questions to explore a deeper understanding of the topic or situation being discussed. Within this project this allowed the researcher to explore what the staff participants felt was driving their decisions on how they chose to work with parents/carers and then the subsequent interviews would allow the parents' perspectives of how the schools worked with them.

One of the concerns of interviews as a data collection technique is that they are defined by the circumstances of the research project that brought the interviewer and participant together (Mann, 2016). A specific concern within this project is the role that the schools took acting as gatekeepers to the parents and this is discussed later in the section on parent participation, possibly only selecting the parents who would represent their views (Mann, 2016).

Telephone interviewing.

Telephone interviewing was the method used for all participants except one who was interviewed in person, as it is a practical means of interviewing participants when resources of time and money are limited (Mann, 2016). King and Horrocks (2010) note that it can enable interviews to take place with participants who are at a geographical distance from the researcher, where travel to meet the participant could be restricted by time constraints for the researcher. This was specifically useful within this project as the researcher is a full-time teacher and therefore interviews had to be conducted around the researcher's teaching commitments, which prevented travel to schools during term time, and the work commitments of the participants. It did not feel reasonable to ask participants to engage in interviews during holiday periods. Telephone interviews can be more

difficult to 'build trust and rapport' with participants (Mann, 2016 ,103) and so they may be less inclined to provide depth within the interviews. In this study, the initial contact to arrange the interview was used not just as a time to explain the purposes of the research and to make sure that the participants were aware of what was expected but also as an opportunity to help to build rapport (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Interview design

The interviews were designed in a semi-structured format as noted earlier and an interview guide was developed to make sure that all topics were covered (Robson and McCartan, 2016). The interview guide for staff can be found in appendix 3.5 and the interview guide for parents/carers in appendix 3.6. King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that an interview guide should be based on the researcher's personal experience and the research literature; within this project both of these were used to inform the design of the staff and parent interview guide.

The initial part of the interview was to explain the project, to answer any questions and gain participant consent, by reading the consent given in appendix 3.7. The following question was to help the participant to relax and was to encourage them to tell the researcher more about the school and how they worked with parents. Prompts were used of the form 'Tell me more about that.' or 'What happened then?' and 'What other ways do you work with parents?' There was also an opportunity to ask the question 'Were there any practices that you used that did not work?' The responses of the participants were noted as to when they appeared to want to close the interview and when this occurred before this question was asked, the matter was not pursued. A final question was posed to participants 'Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the school and working with parents?' and this gave the participant the opportunity to start to close the conversation or to continue the conversation. The researcher and supervisor contact details were given to participants and a check was made to see if they had any concerns before thanking them for their time.

The parent interview guide also had a list of the core practices that had been identified as part of the staff interviews. These were used as prompts to try to understand the parents' perspective of these practices, although attempts were made not to introduce leading questions.

The school staff were advised that the interviews would be about 30-40 minutes and Robson (2002) suggests that this is the time required to gain useful information. The parents were told that the interviews would be about 20 minutes.

Interview

Mann (2016: 71) states that specific issues with a novice interviewer, like the researcher in this study, are that they can have 'more difficulty seeing the nuances and layered meanings' and may inject 'too many comments and questions'. A pilot interview was carried out in an attempt to mitigate this effect

A pilot interview enabled testing of the questions to ensure that all areas could be covered without leading the interviewer to specific answers (Cohen et al, 2018). The pilot interview was conducted with the head of care at the researcher's own school in order to practise the interview skills and to check that the questions were understandable. This gave the researcher the opportunity to gain some constructive feedback from the situation. This feedback included the suggestion that questions, particularly the consent part of the interview, were asked more slowly. The pilot interview provided the researcher the opportunity to practise my technique for probing for answers – perhaps as the pilot participant was aware of the researcher's knowledge on topics, and therefore did not always give in-depth responses, although with prompting always explained in detail.

In retrospect the pilot interview could have been conducted with a teacher from a different school to the researcher's own school to reduce the level of understanding of the context of the school. One omission was not to pilot a parent interview. This could have led to deeper insight into the views of the parents on how the schools worked with parents.

Interview participants

As part of the internet-based survey respondents were asked if they would be available for further discussion on the research topic through an interview. There were eight positive responses to this. However, when the researcher used the contact details provided in the survey only six responded. Of the two non-responses that initially agreed to an interview in the survey, one contact was a telephone number and phone calls were never answered and there was no answer phone facility. The other was an email address and there was no response to three attempts to contact this individual through email. King and Horrocks (2010) emphasise the importance of diversity within a sample of interviewees. As the participants in the interviews were self-selecting, rather than selected to represent a diverse range of schools or individuals, the researcher was unable to ensure diversity.

Staff participants

The six staff interview participants and their schools are detailed in table 3.4, all participants have been given pseudonyms. The staff who were interviewed were the individuals who had responded to the initial survey except at the Irons School and The Purple School, where the individual whose details were provided to participate in the interview were nominated by the person who had completed the survey.

School⁸	Staff	Role
The Irons School (IS)	Carlotta	Therapy Team
The Leopards School (LS)	Mrs Elliot ⁹	Head teacher
The White School (WS)	Michelle	Head teacher
The Saxon School (SS)	Gill	Family Services Manager
The Purple School (PS)	Roger	Head of Residential Care
The Queen's School (QS)	Frederica	Head teacher

Table 3.4 List of participant staff, schools and roles

Parent/carers participants

The school staff who were interviewed acted as 'gatekeepers' (King and Horrocks, 2010, 31) to the parents/carers facilitating and arranging access to parents/carers at their school who they felt would be willing to participate in an interview. An advantage of using the schools as gatekeepers is that this was the only way of accessing parents/carers, as there was no means to contact parents/carers directly. King and Horrocks state that if the gatekeeper prevents access to participants, as occurred at two of the schools, then no access is forthcoming. A further advantage of using gatekeepers is that the gatekeeper can facilitate access and give credibility to the researcher, giving the participant confidence in the researcher and willingness to participate in the interview. An issue raised by King and Horrocks (2010), however, is that gatekeepers can choose the participants who they feel will be most likely to have similar views to their own and this can result in a biased sample. This may mean that the

⁸ For ease of reading the schools have been given pseudonyms rather than the letters (as used in the survey analysis).

⁹ Mrs Elliot introduced herself formally as Mrs Elliot and the parents at her school also referred to her in the way, so I have chosen to use this formal phrase here. All other staff introduced themselves by their first names and so I used first names for these staff.

parent/carer participants were the parents/carers that the school had a good relationship with and worked well with and may not therefore reflect the range of views of views that parents/carers at the school had about the way that the school worked with the parents/carers.

All interviewed staff were asked if it was possible for them to arrange contacts with two parents/carers who might be willing to talk to the researcher about how the school worked with parents/carers. Four schools responded to this request and provided contact details for after discussing this with parents. Two schools did not despite two follow-up requests. The schools were sent an introductory information sheet to pass on to parents/carers (see appendix 3.8). This led to a total of nine parent/carer participants, details are in table 3.5. All names are pseudonyms.

In total this led, therefore, to 15 participants in phase two - six staff from six schools and nine parents/carers of pupils who attended four of these schools.

School	Parent/carer child	Parent/carer child	Parent/carer child
The Irons School	Nicola - foster carer Son Adrian	David - residential key worker from care home Key child Steve	Jan - Grandmother Grandson Bruce
The Leopards School	Jo -Mum Son Ricky Daughter Phillipa both at Leopards School.	Toni Son Alan	
The White School	Rebecca - Mum Son Tommy	Joelle - Mum Son Devon	
The Saxon School	Graham - Dad Daughter Stephanie	Olive - Mum Son Paul	

Table 3.5 Parent/carer participants.¹⁰

¹⁰ Note. Children have given names for ease of reference if they are referred to by the parents/carers.

Note. Nicola referred to her foster son as son throughout the interview and this has been continued in the findings.

Note. No parent/carer contact details were supplied by The Purple School or The Queen's School.

Further search for parent/carers participants

As all the parents/carers who were to be interviewed were chosen by the schools, with the schools taking the role of gatekeepers. It was possible, as noted above, that the schools had chosen parents/carers whom the school staff perceived would have a very positive perception of the school or a very specific point of view about the school although there is no way to discern this in this project. Thus, a further search was made to try to make direct contact with parents/carers through other organisations. Google was used to identify organisations around the country, using search terms 'Local Authority, parent partnership' and 'Local Authority SEN' and 'Local Office SEND' to try to find contact details of individuals who might be able to act as gatekeepers in the recruitment of parent/carers. These terms were chosen to try to identify parent support groups for parents of children with SEBD/SEMH, these terms were derived from discussions with the researcher's supervisors. The plan was to ask the individuals working in these services if they would put parent/carers that they worked with, in local parenting support services or parent/carers groups, in contact with the researcher or if they would distribute a flyer asking parent/carers to contact the researcher at any meetings they attended. Nine services in different local authorities were contacted by phone or email. A Google search was used, and the first three authorities were chosen to assess if this method of approaching parent/carers would result in them being willing to participate in interviews. After the first contacts were unsuccessful, the number of authorities was increased to nine. Each organisation was contacted using the method identified from the website and despite two repeated requests, replies were not forthcoming except in one case. In the one case where the researcher was able to contact a relevant individual, she explained that the parent/carers that she worked with were in such stressful situations in their lives that the project would simply be another stress in their lives and that she felt this would be a similar situation with any parent/carers that worked with this kind of service. This route of recruiting additional parents/carers for interviews was discontinued after this discussion with the individual.

Implementation

The initial plan was to conduct the interviews over a four-week time frame. However due to fitting in interviews around the researcher's teaching commitments and that of the school staff the process took nine weeks to complete. All interviews were arranged by phone at times that were mutually convenient, and conducted by telephone, except for Carlotta, (who the researcher was able to meet in a coffee shop). Interviews were recorded on a hand-held voice recorder. The purpose of the survey was explained at the start of every interview, and the individual as asked if they were prepared to participate in the interview and give their consent for the interview to be recorded. Emphasis was placed on respecting the participants' opinions and their perceptions of how the schools and parents/carers worked in their situation. Leading questions were not used nor were the interviewees guided to particular answers (Cohen et al., 2018) and the interviewees were only prompted to new areas when an initial area of discussion was exhausted. The general nature of the initial question 'tell me about how your school and parent/carers work together' allowed the interviewee to have control of the discussion without too many leading questions. The interview guide shows the key questions were asked, but further details was asked for when the researcher felt that there could be more information.

The time limitations on the interview may have meant that some interviewees were aware of other methods of working between schools and parent/carers which were not revealed by the interview. There was sometimes a need to decide whether it was more important to gain a greater depth of understanding about the method of working together that the interviewees had chosen as most important or to gain a broader, but potentially shallower, understanding about the range of ways a particular school worked with parent/carers. If it was perceived that the interview was ending, then the researcher would ask if there was anything more that the participant wanted to say. Interviews with staff lasted between 20 and 90 minutes and with parent/carers between 10 and 30 minutes.

Data analysis

The data analysis for the interview data was undertaken following the process described by Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) and the steps they describe form

the basis for the following section. Analysis of data in a qualitative study can be an iterative process (Galletta, 2013) and this occurred in the repeated reading and recoding process that the researcher engaged in whilst analysing the data. Figure 3.2 presents a flow chart illustrating the steps of the data analysis.

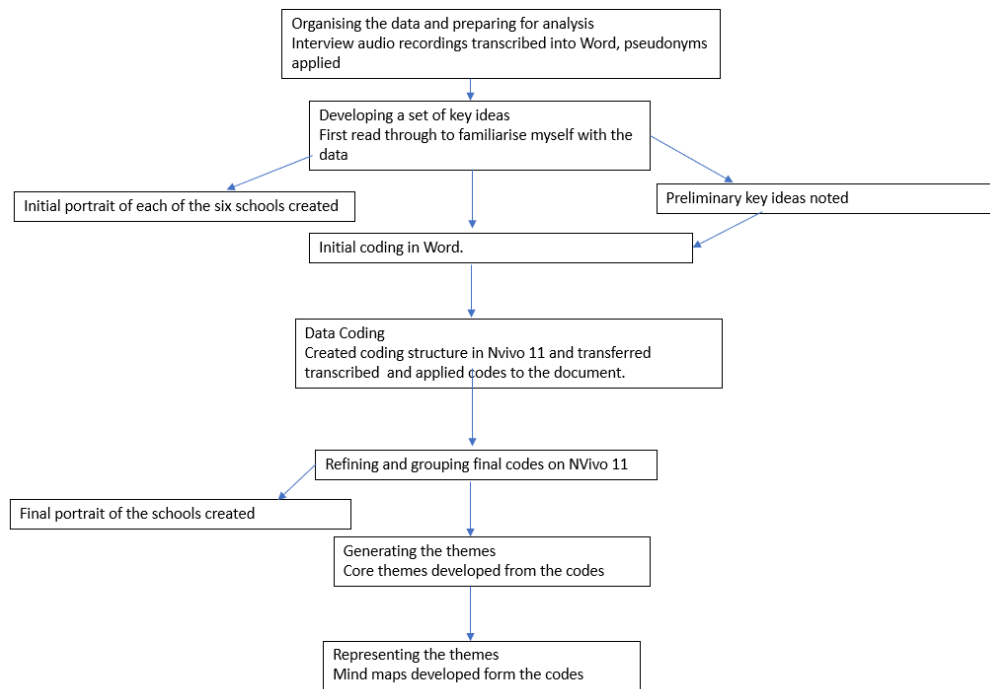


Figure 3.2 Flow chart of the data analysis process.

Organising the data and preparing for analysis

The first step involved storing all the data securely within 24 hours of the interview, by storing on the researcher's home computer and then transcribing the interview digital recordings. Transcription of the data can be carried out with greater or lesser levels of detail (King and Horrocks, 2010), and this will depend on the style of the study, with a study on language, for example, using a much more detailed transcription. A simple transcription system was used indicating features such as gestures, emphasis and laughter as described in King and Horrocks (2010) was used and all interviews were transcribed in full. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher, into a Word document (see an example interview transcript in appendix 3.9). On completion of the transcription of all the interviews, pseudonyms were given to all schools and participants and the data checked for names or any other identifiable features.

Developing a set of preliminary key ideas

Each transcript was read by the researcher; in order to become familiar with the data, at this early stage, preliminary key ideas were identified and recorded in a mind map, (appendix 3.10). To help the researcher to gain a portrait idea of which staff, parents and practices were linked to each school a brief outline was also developed using the interview school staff interview transcripts and any parent/carers interview transcripts, see appendix 3.11, which also includes the highlighting of key ideas in Word as an early stage of the analysis. One of the key ideas, for instance was 'unique practices' with an example being provision of a Credit Union banking facility (LS and WS), these seemed to be practices not normally provided by a school. However, Word has a limited set of colours for use as highlights and it rapidly became clear that this did not allow for coding all of the different ideas that were emerging or for overlapping ideas. The decision was made to use the programme Nvivo 11, a qualitative data management software package.

Data coding

A coding structure, using the initial codes, was created in NVivo 11 and all of the interview transcripts were transferred and coded, applying the initial codes, generating any new codes and allocating codes generated in later interviews to earlier interviews. The mind map, see appendix 3.12, was updated as part of the process to include any new codes that were generated, and some linking of ideas took place. At this stage there were 90 codes organised into 24 groups.

The interview transcripts were then read and recoded for a third time, again using through NVivo 11. Further codes were generated, others were refined, new groupings were created and these codes can be found in appendix 3.13. At this point the initial key of 'unique practices' was refined into two distinct codes on NVivo 'flexibility' and 'responsive to parent needs'. During the analysis phase errors in coding data can also reduce the usefulness of interviews (Robson, 2017). In a larger project this could be managed by using other researchers to check coding. However, as this is a single researcher project this was not

possible to counteract as a fourth read through of the data was undertaken to check that codes had been allocated consistently.

Generating core themes

Various themes started to emerge as the analysis progressed. Galetta (2013, 149) describes themes as 'thematic categories connected by key dimensions.' As a part of generating descriptions Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) suggest looking at how themes interconnect in both cross case and individual cases. The initial key 'unique ideas' became part of two themes. Firstly, that schools are respectful of parents and flexible in their practices, and secondly that schools work with parents to access services from other organisations. The key themes were generated in NVivo 11 after reflecting on the codes that had been developed and then re-reading the interviews.

Representing the themes

King and Horrocks (2010) describe how the data analysis can be presented thematically or in a case by case representation. For each school, building on the initial outline summary, a descriptive portrait was written to consider and present the themes that emerged from the data for each school. The descriptive portraits are too lengthy to include all of them within this thesis but an example of the Irons School is given in appendix 3.14. However, these school portraits were subsequently used to consider how the schools worked and the characteristics and practices that the schools appeared to share that helped the schools to work with parents.

Nvivo was used to search for words and phrases which matched the codes in the schools. This identified new occurrences which matched a theme. This was repeated with each code. Themes emerged that could be traced across the schools. Where themes link to subthemes Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) show how these can be represented with illustrations and in the findings section figures are used to link themes and subthemes.

Ethics in phase two interviews

Similar issues to those in the survey phase still applied, however new issues arose in the interview phase. Ethical approval was gained through a Certificate of Ethical Research Approval from the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, see appendix 3.4.

Mann (2016) states that participants need to give informed consent to the research process. King and Horrocks (2010) describe this as the need for participants to fully understand the process and that ensure that they know that they have the right to withdraw at any time. This was explained to all participants during the introduction to the interview. The consent form was read to participants, see interview guides in appendix M3 (staff) and appendix M4 (parents). Any issues were discussed and then all participants gave verbal consent to the interviews. Researchers should not in any way deceive participants (King and Horrocks, (2010) and as part of the initial discussions the purpose of the interview was to both provide data for the doctoral study and to help the researcher's own school to improve the way that it worked with parent/carers.

Mann (2016) states that the key role of the ethics in a research project is for the researcher to prevent the process harming the participant. The context of the staff interviews, where the school staff were describing the practices in their school, suggested that there the topics discussed would be unlikely to be upsetting for staff. However, for parents the opportunity for discussing issues that were uncomfortable or upsetting was greater. The parents were initially contacted by the school staff from their children's school, where these staff had already participated in an interview. These staff discussed this with parents and as previously stated were given the choice to provide the researcher's contact details to the parents or to provide the researcher with parents details, this was preferable for me due to the teaching commitments of the researcher, but schools were given the choice. The voluntary nature of the interview and gaining informed consent was stressed at the start of each interview. The interview questions were about school practices rather than about the parents' children although, on

occasions, children's issues and behaviour became part of the interview whilst describing a practice, examples of this can be found in the findings section. Whilst, within the context of the interview confidentiality was offered if the researcher concern to the member of staff who had referred them for the interview.

The consideration that the interviewer must ensure that the interview process does not harm or cause distress to the interviewee (Mann, 2016) led to a specific issue that although no children were being interviewed in the study it was possible that information could be given in the interviews indicating a child protection issue. If the participant was a parent or carer, it was the duty of the researcher to go back to the school that had acted as gatekeeper and report the issue to the school. However, if the participant who had made this disclosure was a member of school staff then the researcher would supply the telephone number used for the data and the name given by the individual participating in the interview to local social services.

Another ethical issue is that of participant 'anonymity' (Mann, 2016, 76). Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms for all interviewees. The anonymity of schools was achieved by the removal of clear location data, for example, describing a school as 'an urban location in the south of England' and the use of banding to identify the size of school, e.g. between 50 and 60 pupils, boys and girls. The names of programmes were anonymised in situations where the nature of programmes used could still allow a particular school to be identified. To provide security of the data all recordings and documents were saved on the researchers' own password protected computer and backed up on the computer network servers at the University of Exeter.

Quality of interview data

The interview can be perceived as a less valid method of collecting data by some researchers who use mainly quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2018), however King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that when using qualitative data, it is just that

different methods of collection and analysis are required compared to quantitative data.

Guba and Lincoln (1982(Guba and Lincoln, 1982)) describe the concept of credibility as a means to 'establish the match between constructed realities of the respondents (or stakeholders) and those realities as represented by the evaluator' (p237). Within this research project this is about analysing the data and presenting it to ensure that the meaning of the staff and parents participating in the interviews was clear. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that by prolonged engagement and persistent observation it would be possible to increasing credibility of the data collected for the project. The constraints of this research study meant that it was planned to be collection of data over a short period of time, however initially it was hoped to gain data from a wide variety of sources. As the research study progresses the researcher will develop new understanding and the project will follow new directions as new information becomes available (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), and any changes in directions or strategy can be noted in the research. These were documented as part of the researcher's journal. The researcher's thoughts on how schools could work with parents changed as a greater understanding was developed of the ways the different schools worked with parents. The researcher reflected on their own viewpoints before each stage of the research study and recorded this so that the researcher could monitor how their own views of the issues being raised were developing and how their own thinking was developing. This identified that it was not just the different practices that were important to implement but the approaches that the school took to working with parents. These approaches are discussed in more detail in the findings chapter.

The quality of transferability of a study relates to the readers of the findings being able to decide if the findings of the study can be useful to them in their specific situation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and the use of thick description, detailed descriptions of the themes covered (King and Horrocks, 2010) is a means to achieving this. The use of the interview with both staff and parents/carers at the school was designed to create a richness of the data which would fulfil this

requirement for thick data which help the reader to understand the usefulness of the findings of the study to their circumstances.

Lincoln (2002) developed these quality criteria to include positionality of the researcher, the role of the community in the research, and to provide an opportunity for a voice for the respondents. The positionality of the researcher is a view that is in opposition to the objectivity that is a requirement for physical science research (Lincoln, 2002), but acknowledges not only that the researcher has interests and a point of view on the research topic but also that these viewpoints must be accepted and documented as part of the research study. Within this research study this was carried out via the researcher's journal, as noted above, and discussions with their supervisors.

Another criterion for quality research is the opportunity for the provision of a voice to those who are not often able to access academic research or do not easily have access to government decision making bodies (Lincoln, 2002). Within this project the aim was to hear both the parents/carers' experiences of working with schools as well and the schools experiences of working with parents.

A further criterion that Lincoln (2002) suggests using to measure the quality of research is that it serves the purposes of the community and not just benefits the researcher or research team and sponsors of the research. The initial driving force of the research, described in the introduction, was to find ways to improve the way that the researcher's own school works with parents/carers. This developed into the idea to produce a document that could be circulated to all the schools that answered the initial question how do special schools for children with a primary SEN of BESD/SEMH work with parents, which would hopefully provide some ideas for schools to try to improve the way that they worked with parents/carers. It was also expected that in the discussions with school staff there could be the opportunity to discuss the practices that were used at the researcher's own school. There was a hope that at the completion of the internet-based survey and the interviews could give staff the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and use this as a small nudge to developing their own practice.

Overall the hope is that this research will offer ideas help to improve the way that schools work with parents/carers of children with a statement or EHCP for BESD/SEMH.

Summary

The data collection in this project took part in two phases: phase one, an internet-based survey resulting in 23 completed or partially completed questionnaires; and phase two, interviews with a member of staff (six) and some parent/carers (nine) from six schools. Due to the low response rate the data from phase one was not analysed statistically but used to find indicative trends. phase two interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically. The findings can be found in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts, the first part presents the findings from the survey data. The second part presents a review of the key activities and ways of working identified from the schools that were interviewed. Six schools participated in interviews about how they worked with the parents. Four of the schools provided contact details of parents and eight parents provided interviews about how the schools worked with them.

Part One: Findings from the survey

The project was designed to find out what schools are doing to work with parents. As stated in the previous chapter, the number of responses was low and, therefore, data are presented as numerical totals rather than percentages. An explanation for this is included in the methodology section on Data Analysis.

Age range of responding schools

Age group of pupils attending school	Number of schools	Percentage of Schools
Mostly under 5 years	0	0%
Mostly 5 to 11 years	7	23%
Mostly 11 to 16 years	15	50%
Mostly 5 to 16 years	8	27%
Total	30	100%

Table 4.1 Age range of responding schools

The initial search of schools' websites was designed to remove any schools which did not fulfil the secondary age criteria for the study. However, table 4.1 shows that this was not totally successful as seven responses to the LimeSurvey questionnaire indicated that respondents were from a school with an age range outside of the scope of this study. These schools were removed from further analysis; this left 23 possible surveys for further data analysis.

Gender mix of schools (question 5)

As table 4.2 illustrates, ten schools were all boys' schools and thirteen schools catered for a mix of boys and girls.

Gender mix of pupils	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
All girls	0	0%
All boys	10	43%
Mix of boys and girls	13	57%
Total	23	100%

Table 4.2 Gender mix of the schools that responded to the survey

The search criteria for the survey determined that only one all girls' school was invited to participate in the survey, therefore it is not surprising that this school is not included in the survey responses.

Location of schools (question 3)

Table 4.3 presents the breakdown of the distribution of schools as urban, suburban or rural. If schools are in a rural location this can increase the distance and travel time between the pupils' homes and the schools compared to more suburban and urban locations.

Location of schools	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
Rural	5	22%
Suburban	10	43%
Urban	8	35%
Total	23	100%

Table 4.3 Location of the schools that responded to the survey

Percentage of pupils with BESD or SEMH at the school (question 4)

Table 4.4 shows that most of the schools that responded to the survey had higher than 90% percentage of pupils with BESD or SEMH (18 of the schools that responded to the questionnaire). The reason for this response rate is discussed in the methodology chapter.

Percentage of pupils with BESD	Number of schools
Less than 10%	0
10 to 20%	2
20 to 40%	0
40-60%	0
60-80%	1
80-90%	1
Greater than 90%	18
Did not answer	1
Total	23

Table 4.4 Percentage of pupils attending the responding schools with a statement of special education need for BESD

Different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH (question 6)

A consideration of the different methods of working with parents is shown in table 4.5. Due to the small numbers of schools involved, it is not possible to claim significant links however there are some patterns that emerge from the data. Table 4.5 shows that almost all schools, 20 out of 23 schools, used an informal method of working with parents such as coffee mornings. The second most popular method was for schools to use a daily report card. The schools that chose to use either activities for parents to complete at home or family therapy stated that they used higher numbers of activities.

School	Home/ school daily report card or daily diary	Family support sessions e.g. coffee mornings, drop in sessions	Parent training sessions	Activities for parents at the home e.g. reading programme or videos to watch	Family therapy	Other	Total
A	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5
B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
L	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
E	✓	✓	✓			✓	4
T	✓	✓	✓			✓	4
D	✓	✓	✓				3
G	✓	✓			✓		3
K		✓		✓		✓	3
O	✓	✓				✓	3
P	✓	✓	✓				3
Q	✓	✓	✓				3
S		✓	✓			✓	3
U	✓	✓				✓	3
W	✓		✓			✓	3
F	✓	✓					2
I	✓	✓					2
J		✓				✓	2
M	✓					✓	2
N	✓		✓				2
R	✓	✓					2
V	✓	✓					2
C		✓					1
Total number of times used ¹¹	19	20	11	5	5	10	70

Table 4.5 Different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH.¹²

¹¹ This question was a multiple-choice style question and the total number of times a method could be used cannot be greater than the number of respondents, however each respondent was allowed to identify multiple methods of working with parents and therefore the overall total number of methods is greater than the number of respondents.

The main practice that schools would recommend to other schools.
(questions 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 17)

15 schools responded to this question. The free text nature of this question meant that staff responded in a different way to the previous responses to closed multiple-choice type questions. A few schools mentioned several methods and it was not clear which was the most important, all have been included and therefore the number of methods exceeds the number of schools answering the question. Some schools did not answer this question but proceeded to answer subsequent questions, which described the practice or added practices to subsequent boxes. The generic use of parents to represent parents and carers was maintained unless a school specifically indicated that a different form would be used. The responses to the main types of practices that emerged from the questions on how the school worked with parents are listed in table 4.6.

Type of practice	Number of times mentioned
Communication (various methods were described)	15
Home visits	4
Formal parent group or parent psychological support	2
Informal groups	1
Set up a credit union	1
Once relationships build can arrange referrals to other agencies	1
Total	24

Table 4.6 Grouping of method from the schools' description of their practices of working with parents.

Most schools mentioned that communicating with parents was the most important way of working with parents. Schools indicated different means of communicating with parents with some mentioning more than one method.

¹² Responses were provided from 23 schools

Type of communication mentioned	Number of times mentioned
Face-to -ace	10
Telephone	8
Text	7
Post	2
Email	2
WhatsApp	1
Total	30

Table 4.7 Specific forms of communication used by schools.¹³

This category is broken down further in table 4.7, overall the most often mentioned form of communication is face-to-face, communication followed up closely by telephone and text. Some schools mentioned that it was important to consider the way that the parent would choose to be contacted and mentioned email and WhatsApp.

The way that the schools answered this question was free text and so some schools answered without making it explicit which methods of communication were used (for example schools B C and H), whereas other schools (for example schools A, D and K) were explicit that it was important to use which ever method of communication that individual parents found most useful.

There was no question in the survey about the means that schools use to communicate with parents. Therefore, no clear conclusion can be drawn other than it seems that advances in technology present schools with a wider range of methods to interact with parents, and that some schools stated the importance of using the parents' chosen means of means of contact. One school stressed the need for communication to be both supportive and 'via the preferred means (email, phone or in person)'(school K), another used 'Text or WhatsApp' (school E) and emphasised the need for communication to be as 'regular' and as

¹³ Schools may have mentioned more than one method of communication and so the total exceeds the number responding to the question.

frequently as 'necessary' (school A, D, N and R). Another school suggested that it would be implementing sending home weekly reports of spreadsheets via email rather than postal methods to reduce costs (school A).

School N suggested discussion of 'how the day has gone'. One school used allocated key workers for each child to develop relationships between the parent and child with the aim of promoting engagement and participation of the children in lessons (school U). Similarly, school G suggested that a benefit of the regular contact was 'building a trusting relationship so pupils feel that home and school are working together'. This emphasis on the pupils being aware of the relationship was also reiterated by school F, who described the benefit being that it prevented pupils feeling that they were able to control the home school relationship.

Several schools reported an increase in the use of technology with the use of texting, WhatsApp and emailing data. Some schools emphasised the importance of using a method that each the parents found the easiest to engage with. School C suggested that it was a benefit to parents if they had a single point of contact rather than needing to make 'working relationships with several staff'. Another benefit (school E) of increased communication was perceived to be that staff could find out about issues at home, also that parents felt more involved in what is happening at the school.

Home visits

In four schools the use of home visits was described as part of the way of working with parents. In each case this was a part of the package that seemed to be for the children when other methods were not achieving results. School E stated that home visits were used when a child was absent from school for an extended period for example after an exclusion, to prevent pupils and parents from feeling excluded from school. School J used key workers to provide 'home visits to make sure contact with home is effective in keeping pupils engaged at school.'

Working directly with the parents

Three schools described practices where they worked directly with the parents.

A psychotherapy team was used in school M to work with parents, children and staff. For parents this took the form of '1:1 support sessions with parents with a psychotherapist' on a fortnightly basis over a period of two terms. The school has run these sessions for eight families, and one of the key driving factors for offering is when a 'time of crisis' has been reached with an example given of the child being excluded from a mainstream school or when parents show an interest in being involved. The school felt that one of the achievements of this process was to reduce the anxiety that parents had and to support parents to manage their own children's behaviour.

School B ran a ten-week parenting skills program with the aim to facilitate parents ability to manage students and to provide a team around the child. A part of this program was to provide 'an overnight residential to improve communication and teamwork'. Similarly, the use of family support groups was a part of the practice of school I.

Two of the three schools that described using therapy or parenting classes to work with the parents were schools which catered for pupils in the 5-16 years age group (school M and school B) and school I catered for pupils between the ages of 11-16 years. Therefore, the age range of the pupils in the school may be a factor in the choice to use, however there is no information to support this from the survey responses.

Analysis of the methods used by gender of pupils at the school, location, and age range of pupils at the school

An analysis of the methods used by schools to work with parents was undertaken. There were no relationships found. This analysis can be found in appendix 4.1.

Aims of the practices (question 8)

All schools within the analysis responded to this question, and a range of possible aims were described by schools, some stated single aims and others described multiple aims. Initially I have identified the number of times that each was mentioned in table 4.8.

The need to build relationships between parents and the school was identified by nine schools. This took different formats. School C, for example, suggested that their practice was to enable parents to develop relationships with just one member of staff, the underlying suggestion being that the use of a key worker would make this easier for the parent than talking to many different staff. Three schools indicated that a key element of their practice was to reduce negative opinions about the school. School F suggested that a key factor was to prevent children feeling that they were in control of the relationship between home and school. School M had aims that were not just empowering parents and ‘enabled parents to share support and strategies for managing their children’s challenging behaviour’ but also to give parents a chance to ‘explore their own issues’.

Aims of practices	Number of responses
Relationships between parents and the school	9
To support interagency working	4
Improve child attainment	3
Reduce negative opinions of the school	3
Relationships with child, parent and school	2
Support parents to support themselves	1
Support parents to support children	1

Table 4.8 The numbers of schools stating each aim¹⁴

Table 4.8 shows the aims of the main practices that schools used, the most commonly reported aim mentioned a focus on developing relationships between the parents and school. Table 4.5 shows that schools used a range of practices however this section focuses on the main practice that the school used. School S described how their aims were designed around providing trusting relationships between the school and parents, as parents ‘often feel very isolated in main

¹⁴ 17 schools responded to this question. Some schools mentioned more than one aim, and some did not answer this question.

stream settings' (school S) due to perceptions about their child's behaviour causing problems in class, and that as the school parent groups

'the parents begin to become less defensive and start to trust that staff have their best interest at heart. We are then able to begin to build positive inclusive relationships with parents and carers and often their wider families.' (school S)

School N describe how the aim of their main practice, of a daily phone call home from the teacher, was to help a child's primary to engage positively with the school. As the teacher explained the events of the day, this would give the primary caregiver the opportunity to put these events in the context of the home situation. This regular contact had revealed crises at home of some children.

Developing 'positive relationships' (school Q) with parents was described as important as they had locally 'negative opinions; due to being a school for children with behavioural difficulties. In contrast school T mentioned that parents had 'negative preconceptions of the school' and saw that 'developing and maintaining relationships with families' (school T) was a means to helping parents to develop the skills to support their children to address challenging behaviours.

Aims achieved (question 16)

Description of level of achievement of aims of the practices.	Number of respondents
Did not answer	2
Fulfilled a couple of the aims but most aims were not met	1
Fulfilled most of the aims	17
Fulfilled the aims totally	3
Total	23

Table 4.9 Description of the achievement of the aims of the practices as identified by the schools.

Most of the schools, 17 out of 23, as shown in table 4.9, stated that they felt that their practice fulfilled most of their aims and three schools stated that their aims were totally met. School U described how some of the aims had not been met for

one programme, which had been ended due to non-attendance of parents, as they had experienced transport difficulties.

Other practices that schools mentioned using.

Most schools named practices or provided brief details on practices other than the main ways that the school the school worked with parents. The amount of detail provided differed between the number of practices described and the depth of description provided. It is difficult to assess whether other schools also have a wider range of practices but choose not to write about them. School C put an emphasis on home visits, however not just as part of an assessment for starting at the school or as part of an induction, but during times of absence from school and during holidays to 'let them experience we are thinking about them even if we're not there.' School I used Restorative Justice practices to help rebuild and repair relationships between family members. School U used a multi-systemic therapist to work with families. School B described an overnight stay for parents and children as part of a 10-week course to help parents build their parenting skills. School P used an educational psychologist to provide, mindfulness training and individual consultations for parents.

School E set up a credit union at the school to help parents to save money at the request of the parents, and 'are offered the head's mobile phone number to contact her by whatever mean (sic) (i.e. call, text, WhatsApp); they get more or less an instant response'. This was perceived to generate a feeling of 'being heard' by parents. School E also use an 'elderly' TA (just turned 70 this year) to create a different type of relationship where parents were able to accept advice from this lady where perhaps it felt less like being criticism than from other staff. It is not entirely clear from the details whether this is solely due to the age of the TA or the way she speaks to them. The important part of this is the development of relationship with the parents whereby some of the parents were able to have the confidence to meet with staff at schools to discuss with them that they had need for some assistance with their finances such that a credit union was set up in school.

Evaluation of the practices (question 15)

All but six of the twenty-three schools described ways that they evaluated the practices that they used. Table 4.10 shows that twelve schools mentioned that they used a form of parent evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the practices that they used, and that six schools relied on feedback from staff to indicate the effectiveness of a practice or programme.

System of evaluation	Number of responses
Parent feedback	12
Staff back	6
Attendance	4
Pupil feedback	4
System of Monitoring Behaviour	4
System of Monitoring Academic Progress	4
Other (Ofsted, Lead Parent Partnership Award, Local Authority	3
System of Monitoring engagement	1
Pupil attitude	1
Total number of responses	39

Table 4.10 Methods of evaluating the effectiveness of practices¹⁵

¹⁵ Some schools described more than one method of answering the question and only 17 schools answered this question.

Number of methods of evaluation used	Number of responses
1	3
2	6
3	5
4 or more	3
Total number of responses ¹⁶	17

Table 4.11 Number of methods of evaluating the effectiveness of practices

In table 4.11 the lack of an answer merely states that these schools chose not to answer the question, 14 of the 17 schools were using more than one method to evaluate their practice.

Most schools used some form of evaluation to consider the effectiveness of their practice, with only six schools not answering the questions. The most frequent methods used were consideration of improvement in behaviour either through an improvement using a 'points system' although no details of how the system worked were described, (schools J and L) or through a reduction in incidents (school M) and parent evaluation by schools E, J, K and L. School L listed the widest range of different types of evaluation, 'behaviour points, parent, staff and student evaluations'. The depth of information did not give detail about how the evaluation took place or to what depth the evaluation took place. This was in part due to the structure of the question which asked:

'What methods did you use to evaluate the success of the practice? e.g. behaviour points or rating scales, parent, staff or student evaluations, please include all that were used.' (LimeSurvey, question 15)

This open short question was part of a strategy to keep the survey from being too onerous. The initial perception was respondents might be prepared to start the survey and then give up if the questions became too difficult. This did not occur

¹⁶ Only 17 schools answered this question.

as most respondents attempted to answer the majority of questions or answered no questions at all. In hindsight, it would be been beneficial to ask for more details than just the methods used.

The initial plan was to work on exploring whether there are links between how schools evaluate the success of their practices and the type of practice and whether there are links between the area and type of practice. However, the low response rate means that there is not enough data to evaluate these links with any level of confidence.

Characteristics of schools and school staff which seem to have a positive impact on working with parents.

Many of the schools suggested that in some way building relationships was a key aim or part of the practices they described. This reflects on the fact that many of the parents will have had a previous experience of their child being excluded from school in the past. Even if this was a choice or a managed move then it will be because in some way the previous school has not had a good relationship with the child in some way. This has probably resulted in the parent being called into school for meetings about their child or to take their child home. Some schools indicated that overcoming negative views of the school was part of their aims. The common factor about all of these different methods is that in each case the school has reflected on their specific situation and how to use the resources they have to work with the parents and engage in ways that are specific to the individual parents. A key element of being able to understand how to work with the parents is for both school and parents to have gained the trust and confidence to be open about the ways to work. The development of relationships between the schools and parents was mentioned or implied by all of the schools, including: 'building rapport' (school A); 'to engage with parents' (school B). These schools seem to show a real willingness to work with the parents as equals and to respect the parent's points of view.

Summary of the main findings from the survey

The findings show that some schools choose to find a range of different ways to work with parents, and that some schools reflected on the needs of the parents and adapted their working practices to help work with parents.

For schools to recognise the importance of engaging with parents and finding ways to work with the parents

One of the key findings was that where the schools wanted to build relationships with the parents and to find ways to really engage with the parents to support the children, they were able to. Some of the schools mentioned that this was coming from a background of where there were very negative opinions of the school and some that it was the parents who needed the support. The feeling was in certain schools that for some parents the 'standard traditional methods' did not work and therefore it was important to try other methods because engaging parents was important.

To find new ways that meet the needs of the parents and the resources available to the school

Most schools used a range of different standard practices such as coffee mornings, regular communication daily or weekly phone calls or were starting to use more modern social means e.g. 'WhatsApp' or texts and daily report cards, a small card that children take to each lesson for the teachers to record progress against targets, which could be behavioural or academic. A smaller group of schools used family therapy and parent training to support their children. A few schools used a much wider range of more innovative ways of working with parents, such as the use of an elderly TA to encourage attendance at school for pupils or arranging days for parents to visit schools where there were small gifts available or umbrellas as well as free complimentary therapies to encourage parents to visit the schools to talk about their children. This demonstrated that by thinking outside the box schools could find different ways of working with parents.

Phase two interviews of staff and parents from the schools that agreed to be interviewed.

The first section is a brief description of each school that participated in an interview and a summary of the key ways that the school described work is described in the first section. The following sections will describe features that occurred in the schools which demonstrate the wide range of different ways that special schools for children with BESD/SEMH work with the parents of the children. This section is divided into three sections: Activities that the schools undertook to work with the parents; the ways the school approached developing relationships with parents and finally some of the barriers that the schools needed to overcome to work with parents.

Description of the schools

In this section biographical details of the schools have been altered to hide the identity of the schools, whilst maintaining the character of the schools.

The White School

The White School (WS) is a boys' school for between 50 and 60 boys, aged between 11-16 years based in an urban situation in central England with all pupils having either statements or education for SEBD or an EHCP for SEMH (Michelle, Head teacher, survey). Some of the boys were from the local area, with others travelling from other local authorities. Michelle was the head teacher at the school, and Rebecca was the mother of a boy at the school.

The main way of working with parents described by Michelle was the School Review Day, where parents attended to discuss the progress of their children. Michelle described steps the school took to arrange several incentives for parents to attend the day, including small gifts, free hand massages, and other organisations that parents would find useful to talk to would attend the day. Michelle the head teacher also felt that her age and length of tenure helped contribute to the school's success at working with parents. Michelle indicated that many parents had previously felt that the school was not a place where they were welcome and that this had changed significantly.

Irons School

The Irons School (IS) is a small special school in the west of England for about 60 boys with BESD/SEMH. The school is located on one site and has a unit which provides Monday to Friday boarding for about half of the boys. The initial questionnaire response was completed by the assistant head, the staff interview was with Carlotta, (Therapist) and subsequent parent/carer interviews took place over the phone with David who was the key worker for Steve who worked at a residential home where Steve lived, with Jan, grandmother of Bruce and finally with Nicola who was the foster carer for Adrian. Nicola described Adrian as her son throughout interview and this form of address is used here. The questionnaire had been completed by unnamed member of staff who supplied Carlotta's details. The main way that Carlotta described the Irons School working with parents was a weekly Family Group Session. The school ran three courses with duration of about eight weeks. The aim of the sessions was 'to offer families a space to talk about issues and receive strategies and support' (IS Survey). Jan attended the first set of sessions, which Carlotta described as the most successful, in terms of changing the children's behaviour. Some of the group remained in contact after the sessions had ceased and continued to support each other and their children. There was also a strong focus on the of communication and the school employed a home school link worker. Nicola, a foster parent spoke about the important role the head teacher had in working with her to support her son's placement.

Saxon School

The Saxon School (SS) is a a small school, with less than 30 pupils for both boys and girls and is based in Northern England. Boys significantly out number girls with the girls taught in one small group. The school student services manager, Gill, responded to the initial questionnaire and the request for the interview. She arranged for two parents to take part in telephone interviews: Graham whose daughter Stephanie attends The Saxon School and Olive, who is also a parent governor, whose son Paul attends The Saxon School.

The school had been in special measures about two years earlier. A new head teacher had been appointed and significant changes had taken place in that time

to staffing and the way the school was managed. Gill described the importance of regular contact with parents not just in term time but also at weekends and during the holidays, with the focus on being there at times that were convenient to the parent and not just convenient to the school.

Queen's School

The Queen's School (QS) is a small school, based in the south of England with girls and boys in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Frederica, the Head teacher responded to the questionnaire and the request for an interview from The Queen's School. Although she initially agreed to provide some contacts for parents during the interviews, follow up requests were not responded to. It was not clear whether this was because Frederica had changed her mind or been unable to find the time to complete this or because she had been unable to find parents willing to participate in interviews. The Queen's School had used a nationally recognised parent/school working together scheme as a structure to develop the ways that they worked with parents. These included developing activities to promote positive family relationships, a domestic violence support group, adult education classes and activities where parents and children could spend time together in a supported way. Frederica described the need to work with parents to facilitate the engagement with other organisations such as CAMHS, social workers and housing associations. Frederica took an active role in working with parents including giving them her mobile number.

The Purple School

The Purple school (PS) is a small, suburban, residential special school for about 50 boys in Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 5 with BESD/SEMH in the north of England. There is a residential unit that provides residential care for some of the boys four nights a week (PS survey). The survey was responded to by one individual, whose role was unknown, who recommended the Head of Residential Care, Roger for an interview on how the school worked with parents. This recording used the same method as all the other recordings but for some reason was particularly poor. Some sections of the recording were very unclear, but any sections that were clear enough to be heard were transcribed.

The Purple School used an outreach team to work with parents and families in their homes. Examples described a team member modelling the process of taking the boys on a family swimming trip and providing support to a family to develop the skills to manage family relationships after the relationship between the family and children had broken down.

Leopards School

Leopards school (LS) is based in the East of England and has about 60 children in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, catering for boys and girls with SEMH. The staff response to the questionnaire was from Mrs Elliott who was the head teacher and she also participated in the interview, where parents called her Mrs Elliott. She supplied details for three parents: Jo a mother with a son Ricky and daughter Phillipa at the school, both children were in Key Stage three. A second mother Toni was also interviewed, whose son Alan is in Key Stage 4.

Mrs Elliott spoke about running an ongoing support group for mothers to help them deal with domestic violence from their sons, and a boat building activity to promote positive relationships between fathers or other adult male members of the family and their sons.

Activities

There were a wide range of different approaches that were used in different schools. These included regular communication, which was used in all schools, but some different approaches were used in specific schools. The aim of this section is to explore the different types of activities that these school used.

Role of communication

The importance of regular and positive communication was stressed by all those in the parental role at the Irons School. David (residential worker at a Children's Home) stated that if any issues arose with his charge Steve then he was told immediately. Both Nicola (Grandmother) and Jan (Foster mother) stated the importance of a weekly phone call home. Jan felt that the phone call provided

some good news every week. The school aims to contact every parent by phone, text or email every week (Carlotta), and the regular contact also gives the parent the opportunity to feedback to the school about their son.

When children start at the Leopards school all parents are offered the Head teacher's contact details so that they can contact through whatever means they are comfortable with including phone, text and 'WhatsApp' and the response is on the day. The school also make regular contact with the parents, this is daily when a child is experiencing difficulties.

They 'let me know how good he was or how bad he was or was he being naughty that day or he's had an episode. Phone calls home you couldn't fault them on that' (Toni, LS)

The school also has a TA who contacts any child not attending school. In the interview with Michelle, she described the importance of regular contact via the phone. For some parents this would be a daily phone call. The use of home/school diaries or report cards (survey) as well as coffee mornings as drop in sessions (survey) was a way to provide a range of ways for parents and staff to communicate. The Saxon School regularly used texts rather than phone calls as parents could still receive texts on their phones when they 'had run out of credit on their phones'. Saxon School described the importance of communication during the holidays and in the evenings, with the aim for communication to be at times that are convenient for the parents and times when the parents would need to have communication.

[Single point of contact with other agencies](#)

Schools took the role of working with parents and other agencies to provide support to the children but also to the parents and families. Figure 4.1 shows how the schools facilitated parents and other organisations working together.

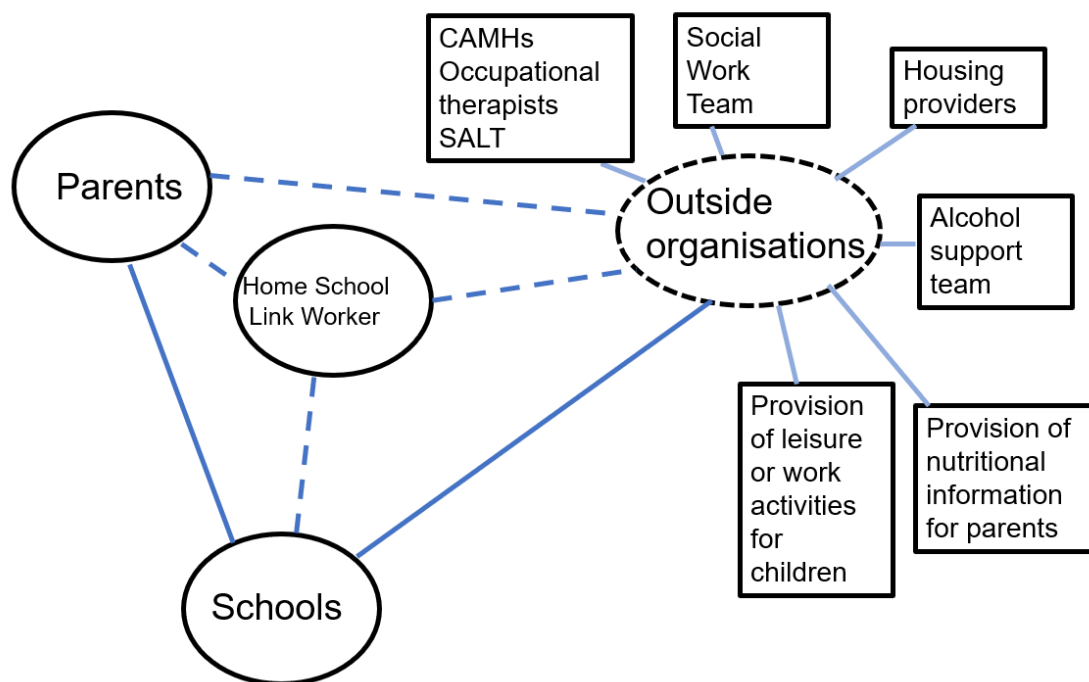


Figure 4.1 The role of the school in providing a single point of contact with other organisations¹⁷

Working with parents to help their children access CAMHS support was mentioned by The White School, The Queen's School and Leopards School. Mrs Elliott (Head teacher, LS) described how she felt that there was a high proportion of children at the school who were referred to CAMHS, but a much lower proportion of children accessed the service. In these situations, the school would follow up CAMHS referrals and find the case closed, due to missed appointments. To prevent this happening the school has been working with CAMHS to get enough notice for the appointments, so staff could:

'sit in the meetings, with the permission of parents, because the parents feel overwhelmed or intimidated because they've got to discuss private

¹⁷¹⁷ The dotted lines refer to relationships that were only mentioned by some schools.

information, or they don't know how to express themselves. It's difficult or they are shy, or don't know to ask the necessary questions.' (Mrs Elliott)

At the Queen's School some parents would ask for help with reading and replying to forms from CAMHS and Social Services. When the family relationships had broken down and the boy was no longer welcome at the family home, the staff at The Leopards School found it more cost effective to buy in services such as Speech and Language Therapy assessments, so these can be done without the parent needing to take the child for an appointment which reduced the need for repeated referrals or providing transport (Mrs Elliott).

The Leopards School and The Purple School also work with the housing department and Social Services to assist parents when they are unsure about contact with these departments. Purple School would work with Social Services to arrange appropriate accommodation when the relationship between a child and the family had broken down to the point where the child was no longer welcome at home. They would work with the family to help them develop the skills needed to try to repair family relationships so that the boy could return home. At times they supply information for the parents to support their own mental health needs who are reluctant to seek support (LS). For one parent at the Queen's School with a fear of the dentist involved staff taking the parent and child to the child's dentist appointment. The Leopards School Head teacher also worked with the Local Authority to arrange a school placement for a younger sibling at a primary school, when it had been necessary to move the older pupil at the Leopards School because they had become involved in gangs.

The White School saw an opportunity to provide access to other services on the School Review Day: an open day for parents to meet all the teachers to discuss pupil progress. Michelle (Head teacher) had described the importance of the objective review day engage with parents. These other services included access to financial services and other support services via the attendance of individuals from local food bank, credit union and financial advice services from the local council. The local careers service also attended to provide information for the

children and for other family members. The White School also invited in the local football team who had a grant to encourage young people in vulnerable situations to engage in sport, this could be the only reliable means of engaging with these families. The school also works with the local university psychology department, whose researchers attend target review day to encourage parents to participate in research programmes by means of small remunerations to parents and children. Michelle perceived this as a situation where all participants benefited as the school, children and parents benefitted by the access to support from the research teams and the research teams by access to a pool of research participants.

The White School may be working with parents who are involved in child protection issues to develop their parenting skills, via a series of joint parent child cookery sessions, in response to court child protection plans where parents were required to improve their parenting skills.

School counsellor

Roger (PS) said that the school also employed a family counsellor who worked with families to understand the child's behaviour, at home and at school, and ways to support the child. This worked in conjunction with outreach workers so that when a child had an incident of poor behaviour the outreach family workers, who have already built a level of trust with the parents, would meet the parents to explain the context of the incident, the consequences and the plan to move forward.

Events

The schools arranged different types of events to encourage parents to become more involved with the Schools. These included Coffee mornings (all schools) Christmas Dinners (IS) and barbeques for parents, (IS and LS), St George's Day celebrations, and music festival (WS) and Christmas Fair (SS).

The White School and the Leopards School both described Parent Teacher Associations (PTA). At the White School the focus was on raising funds for the

school and supporting the running of events at the school. In contrast, at the Leopards School the group had developed from a domestic violence course that the school had run and was about the parents supporting each other and having the opportunity to discuss issues as well as supporting the school. This group would meet for 'dinners' and socialise.

Transport for parents

The schools in the study were all special schools and this meant that the children came from a wide catchment area and sometimes from other local authorities (IS and WS). Students would travel to school by taxi and for some parents would find travelling to the school difficult due to the distance.

Schools provided transport to CAMHS meetings (WS, LS and QS), school review meetings (WS), family therapy Group (IS), and to the dentist (QS). At the Irons School during the family group meetings staff had provided transport for some parents, (Carlotta) as a goodwill gesture, but for later groups this had become more difficult as parents lived at greater distances from the school and in different directions. This difficulty eventually led to the cessation of the family group and the implementation of home visits as this was perceived to be more effective way of providing the family therapy. This could involve staff transporting parents (IS, WS, QS and LS) or paying for taxis (WS).

Home school link worker

The school has link workers whose role is to work specifically with parents with the aim to develop a relationship with the parents and to develop a level of trust with parents. This starts prior to the children attending school via home visits and school visits, and continues with regular phone calls home, or texts, at least weekly but often more frequently. The school used the 'seesaw app' to share children's work with parents (Frederica, Head teacher, QS).

The Purple School used key workers to run an outreach program where staff would work with the boys and their parents or carers in their own areas. This included modelling how to arrange a swimming trip at the weekend and working

with the family to arrange for the boys to gain part time work at the weekends to give the family respite.

One boy's behaviour had become particularly explosive and the parents had 'kept him isolated he wasn't allowed on the street or to go to the shop or out and about.' (Roger, Head of Residential Care, PS)

The school worked with the young man to practise scenarios that he might find challenging and to have strategies to deal with these scenarios. They also worked with the parents to give them the confidence to allow him to try new situations outside the home.

The home school link worker, at the Irons School, assisted some families to gain disability allowances and worked on helping parents deal with housing issues when families were threatened with evictions, either through support with completing paper work or through providing evidence of the difficulties that would be caused to the child's education if the family were relocated. The home school link worker also did home visits to the parents of children whose attendance was not good (Carlotta, IS).

Programmes to develop parental skills

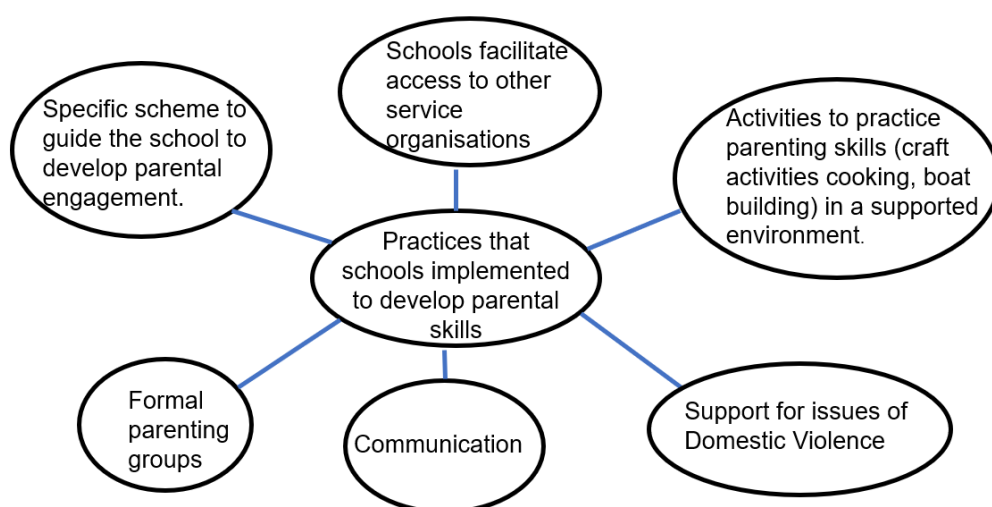


Figure 4.2 Practices that schools implemented to develop parental skills

Figure 4.2 shows the main different types of practices that the schools described to develop parenting skills. The following sections give more detail of the practices that the schools used.

White School cooking programme

The school initiated a programme to work with parents who are on a 'Child Protection Plan'¹⁸ (Michelle, WS). Michelle explained this as parents who had been to court for a reason and who had an 'order' to develop their parenting skills. At the White School this involved a series of cooking sessions where the parent and child would work together to prepare a meal to be taken home, supported by staff with the school providing the ingredients and the modelling of good parenting skills as well as guidance. Michelle stated that although this was often successful, at times non-attendance at the sessions could be used as evidence that the parent was unwilling or unable to improve the parenting skills.

External scheme to promote working with parents – Queen's School

The Queen's School used a scheme¹⁹, which involved a series of modules and was intended to promote high standards of parental engagement, as a way to develop the way the school worked with parents. The modules included an initial survey of the practice in the school through to developing courses to support parents' education. The initial survey identified that some of the parents felt 'totally isolated' (Frederica) because the children were not local to the school as the school had a wide catchment area across the whole borough.

'they felt that what they were lacking was sort of peer parental support because they were finding they didn't have opportunities like other parent's do to stand at the school gates and chat to each other(sic)' (Frederica)

¹⁸ Michelle did not state the form of this particular court order however the need was for the parent to undertake a parenting course.

¹⁹ The scheme has not been identified as it would enable identification of the school.

In response to this the schools organised monthly coffee mornings, to provide parents with the opportunity to meet and have discussions in an informal non-guided session. This developed into a spare room being turned into a family room, where families could meet and for courses, coffee mornings and activities, where a core of parents who would turn up for all the events and a growing number of parents who were participating in some of the events.

The school were already undertaking some of the modules but most challenging was the implementation of adult training courses. Frederica explained the importance of finding courses which the parents wanted to engage with. There was a feeling that the parents were 'just not that interested in accredited courses' such as a Mathematics GCSE or basic computing course. However, the school found enrichment activities, for example making Christmas crackers or a film showing, where the parents and children participated together and were had much greater level of engagement with the parents. Courses for parents aimed directly at supporting their children's behaviour were also successful. This highlighted a need for all courses to be individualised to the needs of the participants rather a formulaic delivery to cover specific points and was another opportunity for parents to form bonds between each other.

[Irons School family group](#)

At the Irons School 'family group sessions' had run weekly for about two years. Carlotta (a therapist at the school) described how the parents or carers had the opportunity to discuss issues, and to spend time working with their sons to build relationships or develop strategies to improve behaviour during these sessions. Each session started with time for the parents and carers to discuss the previous week with each other and the support team. The boys would join the group for an activity, 'collage, the string game.... we made a family crest' (Jan). The boys didn't necessarily work with their own parents but with different families. After the activity the boys had an opportunity to reflect on their own week and to describe what they felt had gone well and 'one thing they weren't proud of' (Jan). All the parents had an opportunity to say how they would feel if they had been the parent to experience this.

‘one of boys said that I ran away and was brought back by the police I wasn’t proud about it. Then the parents said what they thought about and then it all went around, and the others said to the boy what they would feel like if it happened to them.’ (Jan)

Carlotta described a grandparent whose grandson enjoyed playing practical jokes on her, the grandmother found these situations uncomfortable and ‘scary’ Carlotta. The family group discussion ‘improved the family communication and understanding of each other’ (Carlotta) and the pranks stopped.

Although the first and second groups at the school were perceived as successful the third group did not complete the programme.

‘We changed from holding the sessions in school to meeting with parents at home because getting parents to attend was the greatest barrier.’ (IS questionnaire)

Carlotta’s perception was that the initial groups had worked well because the families were in the ‘right place’ to engage with the support group but that the third group had other ‘issues’ such as housing and transport. Parents with their own issues needed to resolve these before they would be in the ‘right place’ to access the support of the family group. After this the family group finished in part due to the cost of using a consultant to run this group but mainly due to lack of attendance. Carlotta described how the school decided to use the resources to provide an in-house School Link Worker to work with parents. Carlotta felt that better selection of the parents and assessment of their readiness to access the course would improve the uptake and effectiveness of the course, whilst offering other means to work with parents who were not ready to access the course.

Domestic violence group – White School and Leopards School

The White School and Leopards School both ran groups to support the parents who were victims of domestic violence from their own children. The White School worked with a local charity to develop a programme to support the children and their families (Michelle, interview). Michelle described how the standard programme had been specially adapted by the charity to work with the children at The White School. However, Michelle judged that it had worked well for a small

group of families, but she thought that there were other families who would be unable to work with this initiative at this point.

At the Leopards School Toni described how the parents' support group had been there when her son had been violent to her and her daughter, helping her to develop strategies to cope with the situation. This had been a challenge for the group facilitators who were working with parents where parents were facing challenging situations such as:

'What do you do with a child if you take their things away you end up with a black eye. You have to be really creative with how you deal with that' (Mrs Elliott, interview)

Mrs Elliott (Head teacher) described how the group gave the mothers an opportunity to express themselves

'they were more open because they were never properly truthful because they felt ashamed about domestic violence' (Mrs Elliott).

The success of this group encouraged the Leopards school to develop other ways to help parents and children build relationships, these are described below.

Boat building 'Dads and Sons' project Leopards School

Mrs Elliott described a project involving boys working with their fathers or other close male relatives to build a flat boat. The project was not successful when 'the dads were too unreliable, and the boys became disheartened' (Mrs Elliott). The school tried to arrange transport for the dads, but this did not improve their attendance. Mrs Elliott said that for some parents their own level of need was high, and they were not able to make the commitment to the projects. She said that the school had misjudged the level of commitment that the adults would need to be able to bring to this project. In the future she would assess not only which parents and children would benefit from a specific intervention but add the criteria of which parents would be in the right place to access the intervention. At the same time developing other interventions to support parents to get to the place where they were able to access the interventions.

Joint parent and child activities Leopards School

Some more successful projects that the Leopards School had run were children's art classes and joint cooking classes, where parents and children worked together. This highlighted some of the parents' needs for recognition of their achievements

'they just want admiration for their own what they might have made' (Mrs Elliott)

These parents were encouraged to develop the skills to praise their children's efforts in a safe environment.

Credit Union - Leopards School

The school had just started a credit union for parents to help them to save small amounts of money for special events, in a safe and convenient way.

Regular complementary therapy sessions. White School

At the White School during School Review Day parents were offered a free complementary therapy session. They were also offered follow-up sessions six weeks later to encourage the parents to view the school as a place that they have positive associations with and regular visits where they could meet staff informally (Michelle, interview).

Provision of child care for younger siblings - White School

During the School Review Day the school would arrange for some staff to be available to provide child care for younger siblings so that parents were able to focus on meeting staff to discuss pupil progress.

Ways the school approached developing relationships

The schools used different approaches to developing relationships, however key themes emerged from the survey and these are shown in Figure 4.3. The following sections explore the practices that schools use to develop their relationship with parents.

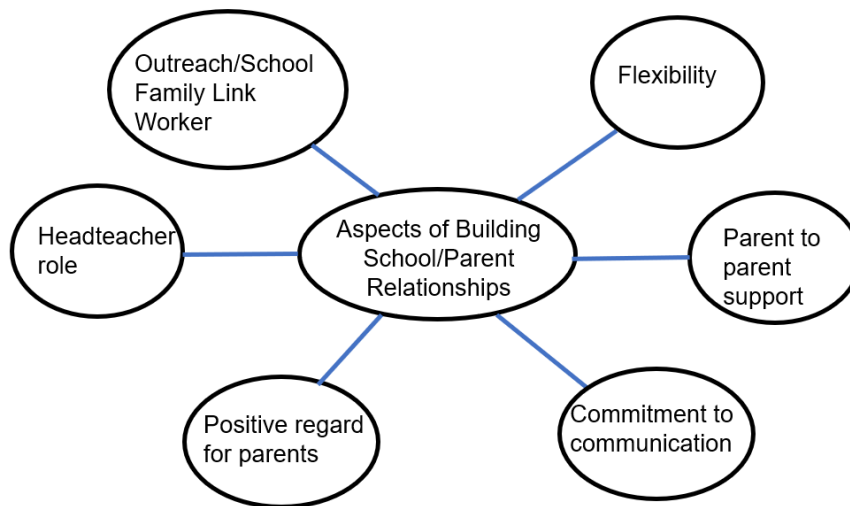


Figure 4.3 Aspects of building school/parent relationships

Role of the head teacher

Michelle described the importance of her own role and her attempts to encourage parents to work with the school. She stated that she felt that this was in part due to the length of her tenure as head teacher which made parents feel that they trusted her:

‘I’m considered by the troubled families in the area as being alright, so I’ve got kids here whose parents will send their children to my school but nowhere else’ (Michelle, interview)

Michelle described how the importance of the relationship built on ‘unconditional regard’ (Michelle, interview) with which she held the parents and that her personal relationship with parents was strong so that:

‘we can have more frank and honest discussions, for me it’s helped that I’m 56 so now I can say “look I could be your mum and if I was your mum this is what I would be saying to you about your child”.’ (Michelle, interview)

Michelle believed that the parents respected her opinion and she felt that the parents felt that she understood their position.

Nicola felt that the Head teacher at the Irons school had been realistic in his approach and given her son time at the school to see whether the school would be able to accommodate his behaviour. She perceived this as giving her son a chance to succeed in the school compared to previous experiences. As part of

induction all parents at Leopards School are given the Head teacher's mobile number to encourage parents to make contact when they need to.

She described the importance of the contact specifically with the head teacher

'she's really good Mrs Elliott because if anything happens at school, she'll phone me up and if the teaching staff can't phone me she'll phone me herself to let me know how the kids are or if something's happened' (Jo).

She also described how Mrs Elliott had supported with her daughter's application for the school, by making sure she was aware of the details of a meeting about her application and supporting her during the meeting. The importance of Mrs Elliott's intervention became clear when she had been working with the family of a child who had become involved in gang violence and she assisted the family in finding 'a school for a younger child who did not have special needs' (Mrs Elliott).

Positive regard for parents by schools developing working practices that meet the needs of the parents

David (key worker from residential care home of pupil at the Irons School) described an issue how the school worked with him to reinforce the need for the boy at his residential home to improve his behaviour at school and home by making a big reward conditional on this improved behaviour.

At the Leopards school when a child's behaviour towards the parent has been inappropriate, the school points system allows the child to earn points, which the child can

'use to buy their mum a little chocolate as a kind of reparation and restorative justice' (Mrs Elliott).

Thus, the school is providing a way to help the child to have a sense of agency in being able to repair the relationship with the parent.

The new management at the Saxon School were trying to repair its relationship with parents from the effects of the previous management team and poor Ofsted. The school organised events to help the community and demonstrated the staff's

commitment to improve the school by working on community projects with pupils to help improve the local playing fields.

The importance of accepting that parents had different starting places and that the school would need to develop different strategies to work with parents' individual situations. This meant that there was a need to adapt the school's way of working with the parents to suit what would work for the parent.

The initial idea of the School Review Day was in response to a lack of attendance at parents' evenings and the perception that these were conflicting with other priorities for the parents.

'no parents are going to come and allow you to compete with Coronation Street so we set up something called School Review Day,' (Michelle, interview)

The work at the White School around School Review Day was to make the day one where the benefits of attending the day were stronger than any resistance the parents may be experiencing from their previous experience of schools.

Positive attitude towards parents

When communicating with parents, teachers at the White School are guided to ensure that when delivering bad news about behaviour or other issues that this is supported with good news about other aspects of their behaviour. Michelle emphasised this was to build parents' trust in the school and belief in their child's ability to improve:

'we've got to try and persuade those parents that their child isn't the devil that sort of relentlessly positive unconditional regard starts to slowly pay dividends.' (Michelle, interview)

The importance of the school phoning parents in the evening, was stressed by Rebecca, and that the calls were not just about negative aspects of schooling but about very positive events that her son was involved in. She felt that because communication between home and school was a strength that she would be informed about her son's behaviour and this had a positive impact.

Flexibility and willingness to develop new approaches to working with parents

The schools' many different approaches indicate they have a high level of flexibility and willingness to try a new approach when one practice did not appear to have any impact. Examples of this include running the domestic violence parents' group, in and the provision of transport for parents and children to access CAMHS services in response to parental needs. A further example of a school working to meet the needs of individual parents was the implementation of a restorative justice meeting between a child and their siblings (Mrs Elliott). Jo explained how she had been unable to attend a parents' evening meeting due to family commitments and the school had arranged meetings at a convenient time. This need to emphasise meeting the parents at times and places that were convenient to parents and not just convenient to school staff was emphasised by Gill (SS). The school employed 'an elderly TA (she turned 70 this year)' to work with families whose kids' attendance is poor', Mrs Elliott explained how her role was different to the traditional punitive Education Welfare Officer approach and that the grandmotherly advice was better accepted by families and had greater impact on attendance.

There was a sense throughout the conversation with Roger (Head of Residential Care, PS) that no problem was insoluble and that when one strategy would not work for an individual boy then the school looks for other ways to help. Similarly, this was reflected in the explanation of how the school had moved from providing respite care to an outreach service and counsellor service.

Parent to parent support

Jan, (Grandmother, IS) attended the family group sessions and felt that the way the group had developed enabled her to discuss issues that had arisen openly with others in the same situation. She described how it had given her the opportunity to talk and they had been 'interested in me' (Jan) and not just her grandson. This helped her to feel confident expressing her concerns about her grandson who she had learnt to fear due to his practical jokes. The relationships with the other parents in the group were maintained after the course had finished

and the parents continued to support each other and the boys. Some parents supported each other at the Irons School by providing transport to meetings.

Jo (Leopard School Mother) expressed pride in the work the parents' group had done to support the school and how the group had started running open day events including a barbeque and at Christmas events and how these had raised funds to provide the children with treats and equipment for the school. At open days for new Year 7 pupils at the school Jo explained how the group ran and supported parents through the year.

'The group was not just school based in terms of working with parents but also the group arranged social events where they might go out for a meal and the members of the groups supported each other as well as working with the school.'(Jo)

The only negative aspect Jo described was that so few parents participated in the parents' group. This was reiterated by a second mother, Toni, who expressed the view:

'What can we do because you get some parents and they don't go and it's like we need more parents yeah there are some people they just don't care' (Toni, LS)

Communication

Gill (SS) considered it particularly important for children to be aware that school and parents were communicating and working together to support them. Nicola stressed repeatedly throughout the interview; how important it was that communication was positive. The attitude at The Irons School was: 'this is what's happened, but we've dealt with it; perhaps you'd like to have a little word with him tonight to go through it' (Nicola, IS). There were also regular calls to communicate when her son had made positive achievements.

'When I ring the parents initially, they think you are ringing for the bad news they appreciate actually that you have not forgotten them, so they feel involved.' (Carlotta, IS)

Nicola stressed the importance of her feeling that The Irons School understood the needs of her son and how this was communicated to her helped build a stronger family relationship.

The personal nature of the communication was described by David:

‘I don’t feel shut out. Very much a part of it, I know that the staff are under pressure and they still build relationships outside of school and that’s the truth don’t feel like you’re just talking to a member of staff you know people’ (David, IS)

Jo (Mother, LS) had been unable to attend a parents’ evening for her children and staff arranged to give her an update the following day at the parents’ group. Toni stated that the school did have parents’ evenings and annual reviews but stressed the importance of the phone calls in between.

‘It’s good like because its filling in the gaps instead of waiting until parents evening’ (Toni, LS)

It is important that the phone calls were not just about the negative aspects of behaviour but also about the positives as well.

Barriers for schools to overcome to work with parents

As part of the discussions it became clear that the different schools were working in specific ways to help them overcome existing barriers that were preventing parents and schools working together. Figure 4.4 shows a summary of the barriers identified between phase one and two. The following section describes the barriers that the schools identified.

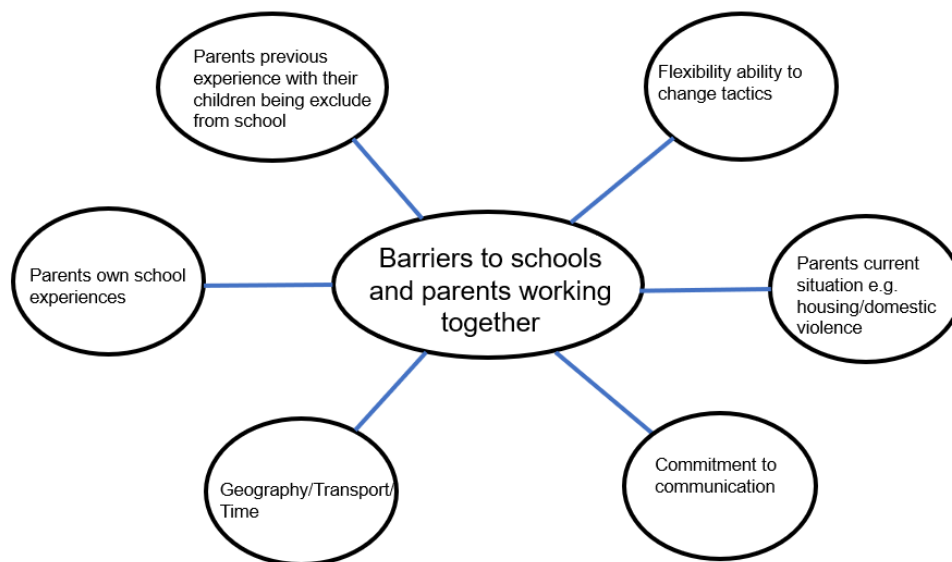


Figure 4.4 Barriers to schools and parents working together identified in phase one and phase two of the project.

Geographical issues

Five schools indicated that children came from across their local authority and not just the local area and that for some parents this meant that attending the school for events and meetings could be difficult. Michelle (Head teacher, WS) described how some parents found it difficult to attend events in school due to difficulties getting to the school with a lack of transport to make the journey to school. Some parents also found it problematic to arrange the attendance of their children at CAMHS meetings. Graham described how it was difficult for his family attend school as they lived more than an hour's travelling distance from the school. This meant that it was:

‘difficult for us to get to Christmas fairs and summer fairs’ (Graham, Parent SS).

Graham also felt that as his family live a long distance from the school it was difficult for the school to arrange home visits due to the time this would take school staff. There was no element of criticism in this, just a reflection on the practical difficulties of the situation. As the parents are not local it is difficult for them to attend events such as sports’ day (Gill, Family Services Manager, SS) so it is harder to form those relationships. Carlotta (Therapist, IS) expressed how some

of the parents had struggled to attend the family group meetings due to lack of transport. Although this was mitigated in the initial groups, for later groups this was one factor which contributed to non-attendance as the family lived some distance from the school and the time and cost to travel to school for these sessions became prohibitive and the Family Group was terminated and replaced by home visits. Many of the families do not live close to the school. The school would do both home visits and provide parents with transport to school for some meetings and also facilitate visits for parents of Year 11 students to local colleges (Frederica, Head teacher, QS).

Michelle (Head teacher WS) described how some parents found it difficult to attend events in school due to difficulties getting to the school due to lack of transport to make the journey to school. To overcome this, where possible she used the taxis that brought the boys to school for this purpose, however sometimes the school would arrange for staff to collect parents or pay for taxis to enable parents to attend meetings.

Parents' current situations

Some parents had issues in their lives which affected how they responded to the school or to their children. Jo (Mum, LS) had not answered the phone call the first two times I called and said that she had been receiving 'funny phone calls' and that she no longer answered the phone unless she knew the number. Phone calls may be missed if school or CAMHS staff phone from other numbers. Also, some of the parents ran out of credit and were unable to be contacted by the school by phone or text but the school tried to use 'WhatsApp' to support these parents. Michelle described how the parents came from some difficult situations with some families having experienced recent bereavements or had members of the family in prison. This put greater stress on the family to manage these situations and lessened the incentive to work with the school. Michelle (Head teacher, WS) described many of the pupils as having experienced domestic violence.

Parents' previous experience of schools

Mrs Elliott, (Head teacher, QS) in the survey, described how some parents had a lack of trust in education and schools in general from past experiences and that

one of the school's main aims was to rebuild that trust in the school. Toni (Mother, LS) perceived the situation differently stating that there were some parents who 'just don't care' referring to their unwillingness to participate in any events run by the school. This lack of involvement was also seen in a recent coffee morning where very few parents attended (Mrs Elliott, LS).

.Michelle (Head teacher, WS) felt that some parents had a negative impression of all schools that had developed from experiences with their children's previous schools.

'because in our school situation we're trying to turn back the time. From a primary education when the parents have been rung up and told come and take your little child away from school because he's the devil incarnate' (Michelle, WS)

Michelle explains that at times parents were reluctant to engage in school. She also described how some of the parents of the boys who attended the school had themselves attended the school, which indicated that in their own youth they had been judged as having special needs and this may have impacted on their current situation.

Nicola (IS) described the difficulties that her son had at the previous school Adrian had attended.

'At the last school yes they would just put him in this room and sensory room just chuck him in there with no explanation why are you doing this Adrian nobody talked to him they just threw him in the room and what would he do he would just go crazy so then when I've gone to get him home then I had the fall out... I feel he lost two years of education at that school because I said to Croydon that's not the right school for him and they went they can reach his needs and once they say that because he's fostered he hasn't got you can't do anything so obviously I had to wait until things got really bad and they said we can't keep him here anymore'. (Nicola, IS)

Nicola felt that she was not listened to and had to deal with difficulties that were caused by the school and was not supported by the school.

The Purple School survey believed that parents had 'preconceptions of school life and the professionals involved with schools' which made it difficult for parents

to trust schools and that they needed to 'promote positive experience of education'.

Gill (SS) described how she felt that many parents had had negative experiences of school both for their children and themselves, so it was important to build up 'trust with the parents when they have previously seen their child rejected by schools and many had had poor experiences of schooling themselves' (Gill). She also described how one of the most important elements was to repair the damage to the relationship that had taken place between the parents and the previous school administration.

'Other work that takes place with the parents was to make sure that parents felt that the team were not one that would disappear as previous teams had.' (Gill)

This is in comparison to the previous school administration where: 'before you'd phone on a Monday and you'd have to call back the following Monday.' (Graham, SS).

Summary of the findings of phase two of the study

The findings show that the schools and parents tried to work together to support the children, in half of the schools the role of the school leader, head teacher was specifically mentioned as being important, as shown in Figure 4.5.

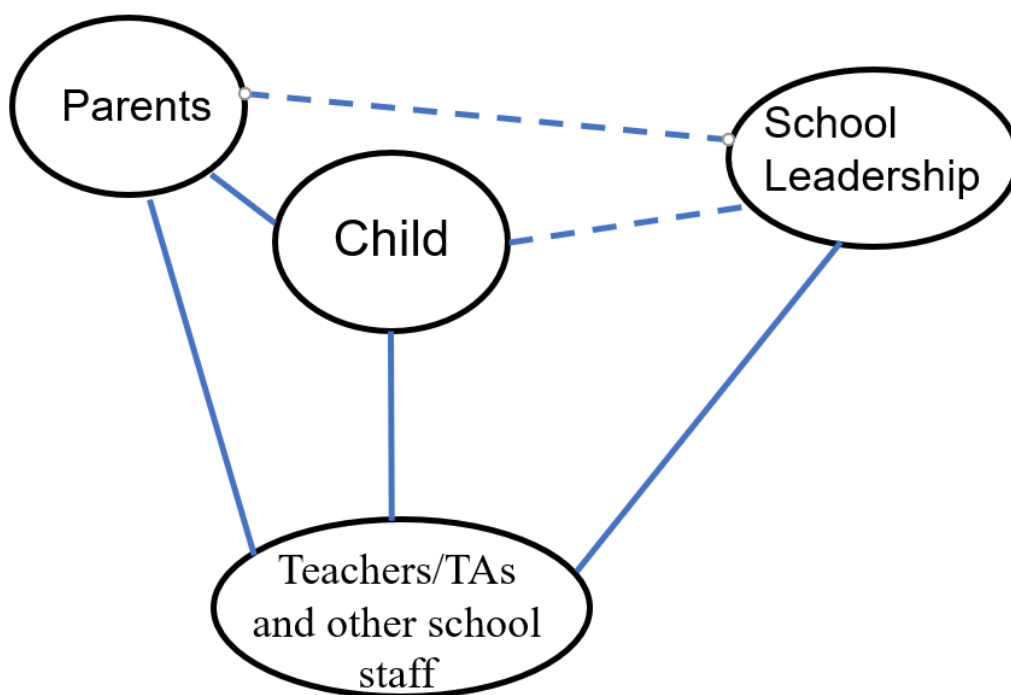


Figure 4.5 The organisation of relationships around the child in terms of schools and parents working together²⁰

In phase one of the project, the internet-based survey, a range of different ways were described by the schools for working with parents, and the interviews in phase two gave an opportunity to explore these ways of working with parents in greater detail; and from the perspective of parents in addition to the views of school staff. Common themes were identified, and these are illustrated in Figure 4.6. This shows the range of factors that can contribute to schools working effectively with parents. The previous descriptions throw light on the range of ways that schools for children with SEBD, aged 11-16, need to use to work with parents, and the flexibility that they need to deal with parents, who may be experiencing a wide range of different and sometimes challenging circumstances in their lives.

²⁰ The solid lines indicate roles described more frequently and the dashed lines those relationships only described in some cases.

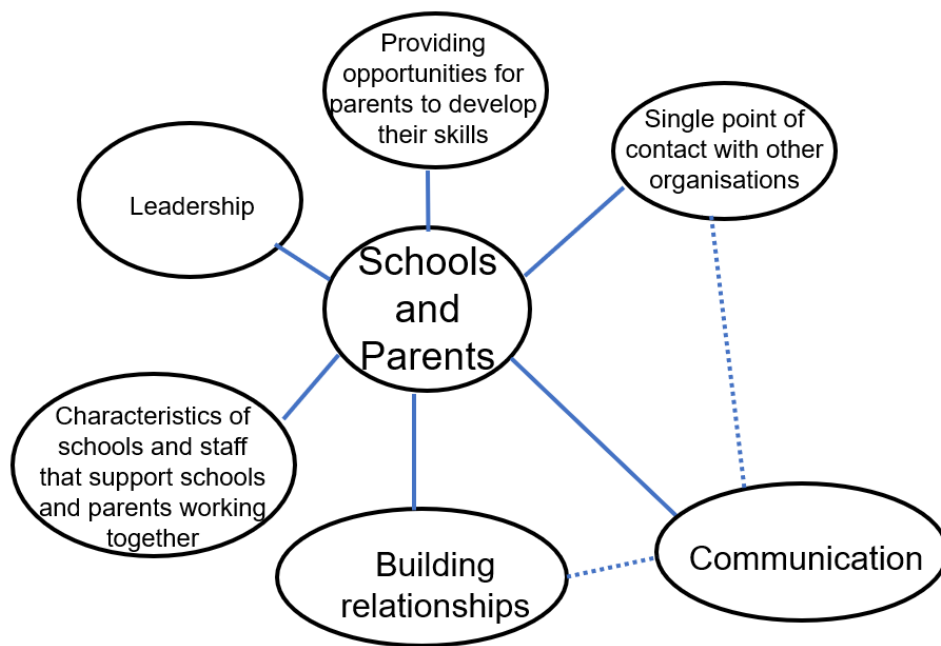


Figure 4.6 Overview of the different themes identified about how schools and families work together.

The project also identified several barriers to schools and parents working together, these are shown in Figure 4.4 in the earlier section. The schools worked to find some ways to resolve some of the issues, for example when parents found it difficult to meet staff at school, different solutions were offered to this such as home visits, different times of appointments or transport to school and providing child care.

The discussion will reflect on how the findings from this project interact with the existing literature on the topic.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the study findings alongside relevant literature. The study focussed on ways of working with parents by special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs. The overarching finding from the current study is that schools want to work with parents to support children and sometimes that also means supporting the parents. This is usually directed from the top by the head teacher or senior leadership. The focus of the head teacher seems to drive the school to work on building relationships with parents so that the schools can understand the parents' needs and then develop ways of meeting the parents' needs which enables them to be in a better position to support their children's needs.

The chapter starts by discussing school ethos regarding working with parents. The barriers that seem to impede parents working with schools are then discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the school characteristics that appear to support working with parents, including: the role of the head teacher; the effort made by staff to understand parents' lives by using individualised approaches to work with parents; schools' commitment to regular communication with parents; and schools' adoption of a flexible approach to adapting their practice of working with parents. There is subsequently a discussion of the power balance in schools between the school and the parents and I will use Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969).

Barriers to parents working with schools

As discussed in the literature review chapter, working with parents is seen to improve the outcomes for children (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018) and many studies indicate the benefits of working with parents through either parental involvement (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Lopez et al., 2001; Nakagawa, 2000) or parental engagement (Goodall, 2017; Harris and Goodall, 2007a). From the success that working with parents appears to bring it would be expected that schools will strive to work with every parent; however, there seem to be many barriers preventing parents and schools in working together (Hornby and Lafaele,

2011). This section will discuss some of the barriers that were identified in this study and how these are also discussed in the literature. These include: the impact of socio-economic barriers; difficulties caused by the geographical distance from the school, particularly of families of children in special schools; issues in parents' lives which may make it difficult for them to work with schools; barriers that may arise from parents' previous experiences of schools, either from their own childhood or from experiences with their children's previous schools. Finally, I will examine some of the structural barriers that seem to exist in relation to parents and schools working together.

Barriers caused by socio-economic factors

As previously discussed, a number of consequences of low socio-economic status have been noted in the literature including lower levels of parental engagement and parental involvement (Xitao Fan and Chen, 2001; Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996) and that parents from low socio-economic backgrounds may have low academic aspirations for their children (Demie et al., 2011). For example, parents with a lower socio-economic status show lower levels of parental engagement in their children's learning (Szumski and Karwowski, 2012) and this links to lower levels of parent attendance in interventions. Although it may not be directly linked to socio-economic status, Mrs Elliot (LS) described how formal courses to enable parents to gain Mathematics and ICT skills had not been popular with parents, however more informal parent child sessions had better attendance with parents. An American study by Hernandez et al (2008), shows parents from a low-income background were less likely to attend Individual Educational Planning meetings than parents with higher income. The White School identified a similar low attendance to parents' evening initially and implemented changes to make the school review more inviting to parents. In addition, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) found that parents who are unemployed may find it difficult to afford child care for other children during appointments and in consequence fail to attend meetings (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). The White School recognised this and chose to provide child-care during meetings. Similarly, staff from the Purple School, Saxon School and Iron School met with families in their homes when parents found it was difficult to come to school.

When families experience lower socio-economic status, this can impact on the families in a range of ways as described in the literature review. If parents' priorities are around resolving housing issues and other family needs, then they may not reach out to schools due to the. Within this study it appears that the schools tried to reach out to parents.

Socio-economic factors have been suggested as impeding parental involvement (Harris and Goodall, 2007b; Harris and Goodall, 2008) such that parents who experience socio-economic challenges may also experience cultural and linguistic barriers between themselves and the school and may tend to know less about the education system and are therefore less active (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Teachers sometimes tend to view these parents as 'hard to reach' but Crozier and Davies (2007) argue that parents find the school difficult to access and it is the school that is hard to reach. Michelle (WS) described a process of reaching out to parents through escalating phone calls to try to encourage parents to attend School Review Days in combination with a range of incentives to promote the day as not just something of benefit to the school but as a benefit to the parents as well. The survey responses also showed that schools used a range of different ways to attempt to reach out to parents, going beyond the traditional letters and phone calls to communicate with parents, using different methods that worked for different parents.

A higher proportion of children at special schools for children with BESD/SEMH have free school meals, where eligibility for free school meals is used as a proxy for deprivation (2018), than children at special schools for other categories of special needs. This suggests that children at BESD/SEMH schools have a higher probability of coming from families of low socio-economic backgrounds, as discussed in the literature review. To help families that perceived as struggling financially at the school review day, Michelle (WS) invited healthy eating consultants to support families to make better choices on food but also allowed for food to be taken home which, she suggested, would make a small contribution to family finances.

Barriers caused by the special schools having a wide catchment area

State mainstream schools are allowed to have a selection criteria that means that they can choose to give preference to children who live close to the school over those who live further away (Gov.uk, 2019) so in consequence many children live quite close to their schools. However, when children have an EHCP for a special educational need then the school is required to take the child if the school is named on the EHCP (Gov.uk, 2019). When these schools are special schools, they may be located at greater distances from a child's home than the local mainstream school. In addition, there are fewer special schools than mainstream schools (just over 1000 (DfE, 2018b) compared with just over 24000 (gov.uk, 2018). Both of these statistics mean that special schools tend to have wide catchment areas, and this means that a greater proportion of children and their parents are likely to live at a greater distance from a special school than a mainstream school, meaning that some children require transport to school to be provided. This extended distance can mean that it can be difficult for some parents to attend events or meetings at the school due to transport issues (Schriber et al., 1999). Some schools in the current study (IS, WS, QS and LS) arranged transport for parents to facilitate their attendance at school events. Carnie (2011) suggests that when parents live at a distance from schools then meetings could be in other locations closer to their homes. In the current study, as mentioned earlier, some schools (SS, PS and IS) went further than this and used the approach of working with parents in their own homes.

Barriers caused by issues in parents' lives

A number of issues in parents' lives can become an overriding concern for them thereby eclipsing other issues and can prevent parents being able to fulfil the expectations of schools. These may link to socio-economic status as discussed earlier and/or may relate, for example, to insecure and low-quality housing. Both Carlotta (MS) and Frederica (QS) described the school providing parents with support with housing issues. Demie et al (2011, 259) note that parents may experience 'low self-esteem, mental health issues, safeguarding issues, learning difficulties' and some parents may experience domestic violence and that schools sometimes choose to focus on supporting parents with such issues. In the current study both WS and LS ran groups to support mothers who were experiencing

violence from their sons who were pupils at the schools. Initially these groups operated as support for mothers; however, at the LS this group developed into the PTA. One parent contacted in the study was concerned about answering the phone, due to previous unpleasant phone calls and did so only after checking the number with the other parent, even though she was expecting a call to arrange an interview. This could indicate that school staff should only call from school registered phones where parents will recognise the number or use other methods where the parent can identify that the communication is from school staff.

Barriers caused by parents' previous experience of schools

Parents' own experiences of school as children may have left them feeling uneasy about schools (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Reay, 1998) and this could lead to them feeling reluctant to engage with schools because of their own lack of skills and self-confidence (Docherty et al., 2018; Reay, 1998). Parents' experiences of their children's previous schools may also impact on their attitude towards schools. In the current study, for example, both Michelle (Head teacher, WS) and Nicola (Foster Mother, IS) indicated that it was parents' experiences of their children's previous school that caused them to feel that they did not trust schools or have positive expectations of working with schools. All the parents and carers participating in the interviews commented positively on the communications with their child's school. Positive communication with parents would appear to be a strategy that schools use to overcome parents' previous negative experiences of schools.

Barriers to schools working with parents

Logically if working with parents is expected to deliver an improvement in outcomes for children, then it could be expected that this is an area that schools would try to develop and make progress in. This section explores some of the structural barriers that can be experienced by teachers and schools.

A major barrier to effective communication between parents and school staff has been identified as a lack of teacher time for such communication with parents (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Plevyak and Heaston, 2001). The suggestion in one study was that teachers felt that there was a lack of support from the senior leadership teams to help them develop this area (Plevyak and Heaston, 2001).

By employing dedicated key worker staff committed to working with parents, several schools in the phase one survey in the current study showed that they saw a necessity in resourcing dedicated time to working with parents. The use of home school link workers was also described by Purple School, The Queen's School and The Irons School, as detailed in the findings chapter. If events are only held during the school day this can restrict attendance of parents who are working (Auerbach, 2007). Delgado-Gaitan (1991) described how one teacher contacted local employers to arrange for their employees to be allowed the time to attend events during the school day. The SS described how they made the effort to contact parents at times that were convenient to parents, and also during the school holidays so that any issues that had arisen with their children could be supported quickly.

A second structural issue may relate to the views of the teachers stemming from class difference. As previously identified in the literature review, a higher proportion of children in SEMH/SEBD schools are eligible for FSM than in mainstream schools, and thus are likely to have low socio-economic backgrounds, whereas teachers predominantly come from a middle class background (Crozier, 2001). Murray et al. (2013) suggest that trainee teachers lack an understanding of the experience and knowledge that parents have and do not appreciate what they can contribute to the education and development of their children. Some parents in White and Levers' (2016) study indicated that they found that a few school staff showed a 'lack of human understanding, kindness and empathy' (p18). The interview data in the current study showed how the school staff described some of the issues that parents had as reported in the findings section; however the key point here is that there was recognition of the challenges that the parents were encountering and the school either helped the parents to resolve their issues or used different ways of working that the parents could engage with at that time. This is discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

There is much that schools can do to overcome the barriers that prevent parents from working with schools (Schneider et al., 2007) and those that prevent schools

from working with parents. The school staff who participated in the interviews in the current study illustrated different ways that their schools were able to minimise some barriers. The following section will consider the characteristics of schools that appear to support working with parents.

Characteristics of schools that appear to support working with parents

Arising from the current study there appear to be a number of characteristics which appear to support a school's work with parents. The following sections describe and discuss these considering the importance of the role of senior staff in parental involvement, in terms of personal impact and the promotion of a culture of working with parents. This is followed by a discussion of the efforts that schools make to understand parents lives and adapt their practices to develop individualised approaches to working with individual parents and also that the schools had a commitment to regular communication. Schools showed flexible approach to adapting their practice to working with parents which included strategies that schools use to work with parents and how they help the parents to engage with other organisations.

The role of senior staff in parental involvement

The role of school leadership has been identified as being key to developing the culture of a school (Findon and Johnston-Wilder, 2018), the achievements it makes (DfE, 2015) and determines the strategies that it follows (Day et al., 2010). The following section will explore and discuss three areas where this project has identified senior staff as being important to the development of how a school works with parents. Firstly, the personal touch the senior staff can take in developing the way schools work with parents. Secondly, how senior staff can influence a change in culture of the schools and the attitude of staff towards parents and finally a focus on building relationships with parents. Depending on the context, senior staff could refer to the head teacher, principal, or a senior leadership team. Unless specified by authors or participants the term senior staff is used to include all or any of those responsible for leading a school.

Senior staff – the personal touch

When the senior staff member appears to stop taking a solely management and leadership role and, rather, becomes one person talking to another, a more personal approach seems to develop towards working with parents. Where senior staff allowed space to build a relationship with parents as individuals rather than each merely following the roles prescribed by their 'job' title of parent and head teacher, understanding and appreciation seemed able to grow. The importance of the senior staff making parents feel welcome was stressed by Michelle (WS), who explained how she made sure that, for certain parents, she would meet them at the school door when they arrived. This need to make parents feel welcome to the school is also identified by Heinrichs (2018) in her study in a rural Canadian school; she describes her efforts to welcome parents to school by providing fresh baked goods and a nice table cloth for meetings. Both Michelle and Heinrichs suggest that they are making a personal relationship, as well as an official relationship between themselves and the parents and that this is important, and each individual gives a little bit of themselves to the parents and vice versa. In a similar way, Mrs Elliott, (LS) makes sure that all parents have her mobile number so in the event of any concerns they can contact her directly. This appears to be her way of showing her trust and respect for the parents. Michelle (WS) calls this 'unconditional regard'. This contrasts with the way that Nicola (parent, IS) felt about the previous school that her son had attended where she believed that her concerns were not considered. Nicola expressed how the head teacher at the new school had not said that they could provide for his needs but would give him a 'trial' giving her confidence that the school would consider her son's needs and meet them if they could. Michelle explained how the length of time she had been in the role of head teacher at her school has helped her build up a level of respect within the community, such that parents chose to send their children to her school, believing that this is due both to her standing within the community and the trust that she has built with parents.

Both Mrs Elliott and Michelle appear to take a lead in developing new practices in working with parents. Some examples of these were noted previously in the

findings section. This concurs with the suggestion by Auerbach (2009) suggestion that the role of senior leadership is essential in developing how schools work with parents. Stelmach (2016) found in her Canadian inquiry into school councils (similar to school governing bodies in England) that the amount of parent participation and influence was strongly dependent on how important the school leadership perceived the role of the school council.

Senior staff - a culture of respect for parents

Staff might develop a negative view of parents when parents have different backgrounds, or when parents lack an awareness of how to support their child or how they can work with the school to support their child (Nakagawa, 2000). This can mean that some teachers can have a deficit view of parents (Auerbach, 2009; de Ruiter, 2008; Nakagawa, 2000) and this may affect the way they expect parents to respond to requests for parental involvement. When Michelle first took up the role of Head teacher this deficit view was illustrated by the teachers' expectation that parents would not turn up to parents evening; however, Michelle chose to drive a change in culture by altering practices within the school. The experience of being a parent whose views were not considered important was illustrated by Jan (foster parent, IS). Jan described how at her son's previous school she felt that both the school had failed to listen to her concerns that the previous school would be unable to meet her son's needs and contrasted this to the positive attitude of the head teacher at The Irons School.

As previously noted, Crozier (2001) identifies that teachers are often white and middle class and do not always appreciate the way parents are able to be involved with schools. Lightfoot (2004) indicates that a deficit view means that schools can frame parents from lower socio-economic groups entirely in terms of what they are not able to do for their children without considering what they are able to do for their children. It seems important for senior staff to counter a deficit view of parents and be committed to developing a whole school approach to working with them, as stressed by Harris et al. (2015). This change in approach to working with parents can be seen at The Saxon School, where Gill, Family Services Manager, described the importance of senior leaders working with staff

to change the attitude of parents to the school which had previously been in special measures. Although she did not directly describe a process of change, the outcome of such a change can be observed from the way that Graham (parent, SS) was pleased with the way that school staff responded to him promptly, whereas previously phone calls were not responded to for over a week. He indicated that the school now considered it important to respond to parents, stating that this was driven by the new school management team. Nakagawa (2000) describes school staff seeing parents from a deficit perspective suggesting that teachers look down on parents and do not recognise that the contribution parents make to their children's lives and education. Ruiter (2008) emphasises how this gives the implication that parents need to be fixed to meet the school's standards. However, in this study the schools seemed to appear to recognise the individual needs of the parents and respect their needs: for transport for parents to attend school meetings (IS and WS); for support for mothers who were experiencing violence from their sons (LS); or for housing needs (IS). The schools tried to find ways to support what the parents needed, as described in the findings section. However, this is only based on the views of an individual member of staff and the parents invited to take part in the interviews and other staff may have different perspectives. This is discussed in the conclusion.

Senior staff – a focus on building relationships with parents

Building relationships is considered key to engaging parents with their children's learning (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Hill and Taylor, 2004) and a part of this is encouraging parents to become involved with schools. This study seems to indicate that an important element is for schools to have an understanding of parents' own aims and life situations. The following section will discuss the importance that schools appear to need to place on building relationships with parents. This will be followed by a discussion on specific aspects arising from this study: the importance of taking an individualised approach, the need to commit to regular communication, and for schools to be flexible in their approach to working with parents.

The phase one survey showed that many of the responding schools had a key aim of building relationships with parents. This may be because some parents have experienced poor relationships with their children's previous schools. As noted earlier, due to the catchment area being much wider for a special school than a mainstream school it makes it more difficult for parents to build relationships through visiting the schools (Gill, SS).

The schools in this study recognised that different ways were needed to build relationships with parents due to varying life circumstances and hence very different priorities for their time, suggesting that the schools needed to adapt their ways of building relationships to different parental situations. Michelle (WS) recognised that many parents were not involved with the school and sought ways to work with parents, for some the starting point was to encourage them to come to a meeting in the school. Similarly, the Irons School leadership chose to change their approach from funding a course to develop family relationships to funding a family liaison worker in response to families needing to prioritise housing issues before being ready to work with the school to develop their relationship skills. There are many barriers for some parents to overcome before they feel able to work with schools as discussed in greater detail in an earlier section.

Staff appreciation of parental circumstances and adopting an individualised approach

When schools undertake interventions and practices that are in line with 'families' values and usual behaviours'(Goodall, 2015, 174), Goodall argues this will increase the probability of a successful outcome. Thus, schools need to understand their parents' abilities, skills and life experiences to be able to work with them effectively. Some schools have a small proportion of parents who are 'hard to reach' (Ofsted, 2011) or have a negative view of working with schools (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018).

An apparent lack of understanding showed by schools of 'where parents were', what they wanted and which parent programmes they were ready to access was described by some of the study participants as they reflected on previous initiatives. Carlotta (IS), Mrs Elliott (LS) and Frederica, (QS) all stated that they

had organised parent programmes which they recognised had initially been pitched at levels which the parents were not ready to access. Some of the study schools, therefore, seemed to show awareness of a need to understand parents' situations and choose to adapt their practices accordingly.

Parents may feel uncomfortable due to their previous experiences of schools as just described but this may be exacerbated by teachers not always appreciating the different ways parents are able to be involved with schools (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). However, within the interviews most of the staff showed that they were willing to try to understand the priorities of the parents they were trying to work with, whether it was the times at which contact was made (SS), through to the need to resolve housing issues (IS) or to the need for transport to school events due to their distance from school.

Where schools are places that parents are already concerned about being engaged with, parents may feel that they are a 'bother' to schools (White and Levers, 2016, 20) and a school having a welcoming environment can make the difference between parents become engaged or being disengaged with the school (Barton et al., 2004). Michelle (Head teacher, WS) showed recognition of this in terms of meeting parents to make them feel welcome.

Goodall (2018) suggests that it is reflective practice that leads staff to develop this understanding of parents. This reflection was an identifiable practice when staff showed the need to change the way that they worked with parents to adapt to the circumstances of a particular family (IS and LS) or if one way of working did not work then a different approach was tried (PS). A part of the teaching role is for school staff to understand the contributions that parents can make to their children's lives (Murray et al., 2013). This should lead schools to consider how they can work with the parents to increase the positive ways that parents can engage with their children and the ways that parents can guide teaching staff to support their children. Some schools found that parents were unable to work with their children until they had dealt with other major issues in their lives such as housing (IS), domestic violence (WS and LS), or understanding how to work with

other agencies to support their children, for example CAMHS (WS, QS and LS). In these cases, the schools put in provision to help the parents to deal with these issues, as presented in more detail in the findings section.

When schools have developed this understanding of parents, a key part of maintaining an understanding relationship with parents seemed to be to have regular communication.

Schools shows a commitment to regular communication

The survey responses showed that most of the schools had as a key aim of their practice to communicate with parents. The purpose of parent-teacher communication, Chen et al. (2016) propose, should be for the benefit of the child. In the survey responses, schools described a range of different purposes of communication, including helping children to engage better in school and preventing children from controlling communication between home and school as well as building relationships between the school and parents. Schools also suggested a wide range of methods of communication, as outlined in the findings chapter. Several schools also mentioned weekly or daily communication with parents. The importance of regular communication is reiterated by (Watt, 2016) who suggests using a range of means including texts, meetings and discussions at the school gate. These varying methods are considered an important way for schools to build relationships with parents. The schools in the survey used such methods and also Apps and home visits in order to build communication.

Developments in technology means that schools have a much wider range of means to communicate with parents than in the past (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). This wide use of technology was found in the responses of different schools in the internet-based survey identifying that some of the technology was used for different purposes such as 'WhatsApp' for direct contact with parents, websites for sharing information and 'Seesaw' for sharing children's work.

A barrier to effective communication can be a lack of time (Plevyak and Heaston, 2001; Smolkowski et al., 2017). However when schools commit the time to communication, studies have found it can have positive results on for example

student attendance (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). The Irons School and the Purple School dedicated staff time to communicating with parents by using a Home School Link Worker and The Saxon School tried to ensure that any calls from parents were returned promptly. Mrs Elliot at the Leopards School shared a mobile number with parents to ensure that they can contact her if necessary, with a response as soon as possible.

The schools involved in the interviews were all special schools and special schools often had small numbers of pupils, (although size of school was not collected as part of this project) and placed a premium on dedicating time to communicate with parents, often with weekly phone calls home. Adams and Christenson (2000) discussed the differences between primary and secondary schools in terms of parent involvement; their suggestion that smaller numbers of pupils make it easier for staff to build relationships with parents could apply equally to special schools. As special schools generally have higher teacher to pupil ratios this means that staff have smaller numbers of parents to maintain communication within comparison to a mainstream school.

Schools need to have a flexible approach to adapting their practice to working with parents. There is no one way that school can engage with all parents and Goodall (2015) notes that there will need to be different ways for different parents, however schools are responsible for how they engage with parents. It is considered important to adapt the ways that schools work to the needs of each family (C Campbell, 2011), this could be to arrange meetings at times that are convenient for parents (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Lareau, 2011) or the location of meetings could be arranged so that parents without transport can attend meetings (Carnie, 2011; Schriber et al., 1999). Both Purple School and Saxon School resolved both these issues by arranging to meet parents at weekends and at their homes, whereas Irons School and White School mainly focussed on transporting parents to school. In addition, Irons School and Purple School had dedicated staff in the form of a Home School Link Worker to focus on developing communication and relationships with parents. It could also be that meeting a parent in their home could be less intimidating for some parents

(Carnie, 2011), particularly if they are already uncomfortable about attending school.

School ethos and working with parents

The ethos of the school as to working with parents will determine how the school reaches out to parents with a range of approaches from contacting parents to requiring parents to meet a predetermined set of expectations of the school. This section will explore the different approaches schools use.

Nakagawa (2000) raises the question about the role of parents' involvement in schools and whether it is for parents to support the school in their decisions or if it is for parents to challenge the school's decisions. Although individual parents may work with schools, Arnstein (1969) suggests that it is the distribution of power within the relationship that determines the level of participation. Schools can see parents as individuals who they can work with to support the children that they are both responsible for (Harris and Goodall, 2008), this can involve parents in positions of some power in terms of participating as a School Governor (Carnie, 2011) or raising funds for the schools as part of a PTA (Carnie, 2011), Olive (Mum, SS) was a school governor and Toni (Mum, LS) was a member of the PTA. In other situations schools can treat parents in a way that makes them feel that they are a bit of 'a bother' to the schools (White and Levers, 2016) – here, the power is held by the school. This contrasts with how Michelle (Head teacher, WS) described how she viewed parents 'with unconditional regard'. Parents can also be in a variety of life situations and have different needs to manage as well as managing to work with schools (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Several schools in the study mentioned working with parents to resolve housing issues, to set up support groups for parents experiencing domestic violence, as well as providing information about how to seek support for financial difficulties and mental health needs. It seems that when schools actively choose to work with parents, whatever their situation or circumstances that they can reduce the barriers to working with parents. This suggests that schools work in a range of different ways with parents

depending on the individual needs and circumstances and the following sections discuss this in more detail.

Practices that schools use to work with parents

This section discusses the different ways that schools use to work with parents. The schools used a wide range of different practices to work with parents and had a flexible approach of trying one practice and if that did not help the school and parents to work together then the school would try a different approach. The schools involved in the project showed that they tried to understand the individual circumstances of parents and that they tried to work flexibly and adapt their practices and approaches to the individual circumstances of a parent or groups of parents.

The first section will discuss how schools can work with parents to how schools work to minimise the barriers to parents working with schools; finding ways to support families in low socio-economic circumstances and creating a school environment to encourage parents to want to be working with schools and developing positive communication strategies.

Schools working with parents to help the parents to engage with other organisations

In the findings section it was noted that some of the schools participating in the interviews assisted parents to liaise with several different agencies and that they did so in a range of ways. The following section will discuss this role of schools. The SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015) describes the importance of schools and other agencies working together to support the child. Collaboration between schools, other agencies and parents, however, has often been found to be problematic. For example, a research study by Boesley and Crane (2018) research into the perspectives of SENCOs found that many in their small study perceived that it was difficult to engage health professionals or social care professionals in the EHCP planning process. These views were echoed by 37 parents (60%) in Tétreault et al.'s (2014) study into the views of 56 Canadian parents' and carers' views on the provision of SEN services for their children who felt that collaborative working was non-existent or not sufficiently implemented

during planning meetings to support their children's needs. Many parents in Tétreault et al.'s (2014) study felt dissatisfied with the collaboration between education and health professionals feeling that there was a culture with a 'tendency to pass the buck' resulting in their children not receiving the services that they were entitled to receive (Tétreault et al., 2014, 829).

Carnie (2011) suggested that it can be very useful for schools to work with other service providers to assist parents in finding appropriate support. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) suggest that as some services in other areas have been cut schools feel that they are expected to fill in the gaps. Gondek and Lereya (2018) describe how schools could provide a hub for mental health provision to parents as well as students. Although not providing this within the school, The Leopards School directed parents towards mental health provision when this need arose. Further examples of the ways the study schools worked with parents are detailed in the findings chapter, including working with parents involved in child protection issues (WS), and working with parents to arrange a school place for another child in the family (LS). As previously stated, not all parents had positive experiences of education and some found it difficult to access information from other organisations. This may be due to parents' language difficulties or a lack of cultural understanding of what is expected from other organisations. Lopez et al. (2001) and Haneda and Alexander (2015) both reported examples of school staff translating and explaining documents for parents to help them access health and social benefits. A similar requirement to explain documents from other organisations was found at The Leopards School, The Purple School and The Queen's School.

Schools working to minimise the geographic barriers of parents living at a distance from schools

Parents can have difficulty attending appointments at school (Friesen and Huff, 1990) and it is reasonable to conclude that they may also have difficulties arranging for their children to attend health or other appointments. The White School, The Queen's School and The Leopards School all arranged transport for parents to attend health appointments for their children, and, in the case of the Leopards School, sent staff to CAMHS meetings. To reduce the difficulty for

parents in taking their children to other services, The Leopard School had chosen to locate some health services within the school increasing attendance at health-related meetings.

Schools working to support families in low-socio-economic circumstances.

A higher proportion of families with BESD/SEMH are likely to be from lower socio-economic status, as previously noted, and therefore finances can be limited and make it difficult for families to adequately provide for all their needs. Hornby and Blackwell (2018, 114) describe how schools have assisted parents in resolving 'debt problems, court cases, clothing, food parcels, white goods, Christmas presents' and Lopez et al. (2001) found in their American study staff working with The Red Cross and the Salvation Army to support families. In the situations above the school are providing or facilitating access to services which would not normally be perceived as being the responsibility of the school but of social services. The White School in particular identified a similar need to provide parents with additional food and help with housing needs although in different circumstances to those in the study by Lopez et al. (2001) and facilitated parents with access to a range of other organisations through their School Review Day. Overall schools seem to be facilitating access to a wider range of services, providing information and working with parents to help them access a wide range of services outside of schools, such as housing services and social services (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018) and this is reflected in the ways that the schools in this project provide assistance for parents to access different organisations.

Power balance within the schools

Arnstein (1969) suggests that the ways that an organisation can work with individuals is hierarchical in nature taking the form of a ladder, with activities at the lower levels allowing more power to the organisation and less to the individuals. As progression is made up the rungs of the ladder there is a shift in the balance of power from the organisation to individuals (Arnstein, 1969). As noted throughout this thesis and as found in the current study, schools can work

with parents in many ways. Table 5.1 show how the study schools' practices in working with parents can be mapped against Arnstein's ladder of participation.

Parents' level of participation	Description of the rungs of the ladder	School practices in working with parents
Citizenship control	Citizens have obtained the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.	
Delegation		
Partnership	The individual citizens have the ability to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with those in power.	Parents as school governors
Placation	Citizens have the ability to advise but retain those in power continued right to decide.	Parent participation in PTA
Consultation	The citizens may be heard and be able to hear the views of those in power, however there is not assurance that those in power will respond to the citizens views.	Staff making weekly phone calls home
Informing		Seesaw App to show parents children's work
Therapy	Those holding power are seeking to 'cure' or 'educate' the citizens as opposed to encourage real participation.	Parent groups, domestic violence groups Dad's boat building project Family therapy Craft and cooking activities Parenting skills courses Supporting parents to work with other organisations
Manipulation		Incentives to encourage attendance at meetings, transport, arranging meetings at home

Increasing parent power within the school

Table 5.1 Ladder of participation for study schools' activities for working with parents developed from Arnstein (1969)

Arnstein's ladder of participation is being used as a tool to analyse the way that schools can be seen to be working with parents. There is some degree of hierarchy that schools are working towards and this can be mapped against this ladder of participations. The 'bottom' rungs of the ladder, where Arnstein (1969)

denotes participation as 'manipulation' and therapy, power and control remain with the organisation, in this project that is the schools. The strategies that Michelle (Head teacher, WS) stated that she used to encourage some parents to attend the School Review Day, which included giving small gifts, could possibly be perceived as manipulation. There are many examples of the schools working with parents to develop their skills from groups to support parents dealing with domestic violence, parenting skills opportunities and courses for GCSE ICT and Mathematics skills. Arnstein (1969) describes this as a non-participatory role, whereas this feels like the schools are giving the parents the skills to start to take control of their own situations and seems much more active in giving power to parents in their own lives.

The next rung of Arnstein's ladder is the provision of information and consulting (of parents in this situation) where Arnstein describes this as being the organisation listening to the citizen. The schools showed that they listened to the parents and responded to their needs in terms of the different practices that they used as well as responding to concerns about the children. Schools also provided parents with information about children's progress and behaviour, through regular communication and a variety of technological means.

Arnstein describes the next level up as that of placation where citizens have a voice however the organisation does not have to respond to the advice that it is given. The perception of the PTAs that were described by parents was that they were operating at this level with parents supporting the school by fundraising and work as part of the team organising events such as the summer fair for the school. The parents did not mention participating in decision making about the school but how they contributed to the school. The next level on the participation ladder Arnstein describes as participation where the citizens are able to work with the organisation to 'make trade-offs' suggesting that the parents can negotiate with the school to obtain what they want and this seems to correspond with individual parents being able to take the role of school governor (DfE, 2017) or to have a place on school councils (Carnie, 2011; Stelmach, 2016). The final two levels of Arnstein's ladder of participation are delegated power and citizen control, it is not

clear if any of the schools were working at this level although it may be that the schools are and that this was not discussed as part of the interview.

The ladder of participation is only being used to try to analyse the different ways that the schools work and it is possible that several of the practices could fit into different rungs of the ladder and that how a particular practice works in one school may be completely different in another school. Equally, some of the other work that the schools undertook with parents such as providing transport to school events or their children's health appointments is less easily categorised within Arnstein (1969) model of participation. The provision of a parent's room (Carnie, 2011) as used at The Queen's School to provide a space for parents to participate in their own learning and celebrate the development of their own skills, may be giving individuals the skills to start to take more control of aspects of their lives. If the schools have initially had low levels of working with parents, then it may take a significant time for schools to develop their practice to increase both the numbers of parents working with the schools and the degree of participation at which they worked. Michelle (Head teacher, WS) suggested that it had taken a long time for the improvements the school had implemented to work with parents, and to take effect. Likewise, it could take parents who may have previously had poor experiences of schools, in their own schooling or their children's schools, a significant time to be ready to trust schools again and to be ready to work with them. Where parents have had previous negative experiences from schools, such as Jan (parent, IS) when she describes how her concerns about her son's education at a previous school were ignored, it can take time for the parent to feel secure in working with the school. This means that it is not just the practices and beliefs of the school that determine the level of power that the school is able to do give to parents but will also depend on parents' willingness and readiness to accept great levels of power to themselves. For some of the parents in the study the first step appeared to be taking power and control over their own lives where they had experienced domestic violence or housing issues, before they were able to work with the schools and take some control of their role within the school.

Summary of discussion

The discussion explored how the schools that participated in the project demonstrated an ethos of wanting to work with the parents of the children attending the schools. It was seen by both parent and staff participants that the head teacher could take a key role in helping the school to develop a positive approach to working with parents and schools choosing to reach out to them, to communicate and build relationship with parents making sure that the schools understood the parents circumstances how they can best work with the them. This involved schools examining their practices to offer practices are useful to the parents in terms of meeting the parents needs and also convenient for parents in terms of location and timing. This study showed examples of schools adapting their practice to meet the needs of parents and an approach that was both flexible and resilient in terms of when one practice did not meet the needs of the parents, then a different method was adopted. An aspect of this flexible approach could be listening to the parents' circumstances and providing activities and practices that can help the parent to manage their circumstances. This could be helping the parent to work with other organisations such as housing organisations or giving access to information about health or financial support, or it could take the form of the school providing services themselves in terms of domestic violence support groups, or parenting skills courses. The key was that the schools were reaching out to parents and responding to the parents' needs as to how the schools could work with the parents.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter starts with a summary of the project and then considers the contribution made by this research to knowledge relating to special schools and working with parents. This will be followed by recommendations for practice in special schools, a discussion of the strength and limitations of the research methods and processes and suggestions for further areas of research. Reflections on the research journey will follow and a consideration of developing ideas about qualitative and quantitative research and on working with parents

Summary of the project

This was a two-phase project examining how special schools for children aged 11-16 with statements for BESD or EHCPs for SEMH worked with parents, involving a survey followed by interviews with a member of staff and a selection of parents from across six different schools. The initial phase was an internet-based survey for SENCOs/senior leaders in all special schools which had a categorisation of BESD at the start of the project and where more than 5% of pupils had a statement for BESD and provided education for pupils in the 11-16 years of age a total of 270 schools.

The survey response rate was low at 11%, with only 23 responses that matched the criteria. The only clear finding was that schools felt that communicating with parents was important and that some schools had started to use technology to improve communication with parents. As part of the survey, staff were asked to participate in a follow-up interview and staff from six schools agreed and were interviewed. Four schools gave permission for nine parents to be interviewed, this resulted in a total of 15 interviews.

The interviews showed that schools worked with parents in a range of different ways. The most commonly mentioned was the importance of communication between school and parent, not only when there were negative issues, but also about positive events and making sure that schools responded promptly to parents. An aspect that was not as overtly discussed as communication was that when other activities or practices had not seemed to be effective, the schools listened and responded to the parents about their individual situations. This communication was facilitated by a range of different roles in the schools, from

head teachers, school counsellors or therapists and school and family liaison workers. A point of note was that the schools also facilitated access to different agencies to assist parents with securing services to support their children.

Some schools described specific programmes to develop parental skills. These varied in the degree of formality from, for example, the provision of formal parenting programmes to informal activities including craft and cooking activities designed to help parents to spend positive time with their children.

The study highlighted that transport was an issue for some parents to attend events at school or meetings. This was resolved by some schools by transport being provided by taxi or by members of staff, whereas other schools described working with families in their homes and communities.

A major theme that developed was the way the schools approached developing relationships with parents. The importance of the role of the head teacher was also stressed by parents within the schools, which appears to indicate that if the head teacher feels that working with parents is important then this approach will encompass the whole school. This resulted in schools having a flexible approach to working with parents. This flexible attitude was of note with schools that persisted with parents; when one approach did not work, they tried something different until they found something that worked. This suggests that the schools had a resilient approach to working with parents, not giving up when parents did not immediately engage with school practices.

Throughout the project schools suggested that there were a number of barriers for parents to overcome before they were able to work with schools. The schools suggested that some parents needed to overcome specific issues. For example, about the issue of transport to the school, previously noted, schools found ways to resolve this issue through different solutions. Some schools suggested that parents had issues in their own lives, such as housing difficulties or financial difficulties which meant that these families had less time to work with schools. In addition, if a parent's previous experience of school was negative, either in terms of their own school experience or their children's experience then this could be a factor in relation in working with the school.

The overall outcomes suggest that some schools take a positive approach to working with parents, through understanding the parents as individuals and adapting their practices for individuals, as well as providing a range of different opportunities for parents to work with schools in ways that are appropriate for their circumstances.

Contribution to knowledge

This project contributes to knowledge in a variety of ways. These included exploring an area with no previous research, focusing on how maintained special schools for children aged 11-16 years with Statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH understand and respond to their parents' situations and needs, and work with these parents. It also includes looking at the barriers to school-parent working and the role of the school.

Investigates an area with no previous research

This project provides some insights into the ways that some special schools for children aged 11 to 16 years with statements or EHCPs for BESD/SEMH work with parents. Although the research was small scale it suggests that schools use a wide range of different practices to work with parents, and that the schools often take an approach that is flexible and responsive to parents' needs and situations. It identifies not only the breadth of ways that these schools work with parents, but also the notion of a culture where working with parents and reaching out to parents was considered normal practice. This is in contrast with the view expressed by some members of staff that parents were hard to reach, as previously discussed in the literature review. The importance of the role of the head teacher and senior staff in ensuring that staff perceive working with parents as a key part of their job was highlighted. However, it is also important that head teachers and senior staff take a personal role in working with parents to make them feel valued and to increase their willingness to work with schools.

Special schools are responsive to parent needs

One contribution to knowledge concerns the responsiveness of special schools. Special schools, due to having smaller pupil numbers than most mainstream schools, may be able to work more closely with parents than mainstream schools.

This research illustrates the detail of how this works in special schools for children aged 11-16 with statements for BESD or EHCPs for SEMH. Schools may be working with parents to assist them in helping their child and secondly helping the parents directly with aspects of their own home circumstances.

The research indicated that parents have different home situations, may experience different issues and may have different support structures around them. Some parents may have competing difficulties in their lives that they need to work to resolve, some may be unaware of how they can resolve these issues, and this can impact on the parent's ability to support their child. This research suggests that when schools understand a parent's situation, they can then work with the parent from 'where they are', helping the parent to resolve issues first and then working with the parent to meet the child's needs, as opposed to expecting the parent to simply meet the school's expectations. This degree of understanding and responsiveness is a common expectation of schools in respect of children; extending this to parents seemed to enable schools to work with parents in ways that can support both child and parent. An aspect of this to note would be for schools not to be judgemental about a parent's situation but to respect the parent for who they are and their needs at that particular point in time.

One role of both parents and schools is to help a child to develop both social and academic skills. When schools and parents work together then this can have a positive impact on children's development (Harris et al., 2015). In the current study, some parents gave examples of the school's support for their child and gave the impression that they felt that the schools were listening to them. Although the power balance was still in the school's favour, this implies that the school respected the parents' opinions and sought to resolve issues. For special schools which provide for children with BESD/SEMH needs, there is a necessity to listen to parents needs and to find ways to respond may be greater than for other schools, as these schools have a higher proportion of children receiving FSM than other schools. This may indicate that these families can experience more challenging home circumstances, and some may not have the skills to access the services that are there to assist them. This was indicated by schools mentioning needing to read letters to parents from other organisations. Schools

need to be responsive to how, where and at what times they communicate with parents and ask parents to work with the school or attend meetings. Parents have their own lives and circumstances which can make it difficult for the parents to attend meetings or communicate with the school and schools need to be flexible as to what they ask from parents. A possible solution could be to arrange for meetings or communication to be at times or places that are convenient to parents or could be to use technology that is convenient to parents such as WhatsApp. Schools also need to listen to parents to understand the barriers that are preventing parents from working with the schools.

Breadth of different approaches that schools used to work with parents to overcome barriers to school-parent working

This project suggests that schools work with parents in a range of different ways. Although (Carnie, 2011) lists a wide range of ways that schools work together with parents, this project identified the individuality of the way in which the schools worked with parents. In the findings section, these practices are described in more detail. The contribution to knowledge is that the schools would use some practices that were school wide but other practices that were implemented for individual parents. Some of the practices that schools implemented were roles that would not normally be expected of schools, providing transport for parents, and domestic violence support groups. However, other practices were adapted that would normally be within the school role, for example parents' evenings and home school communication and adapting these to the parents' and the schools' specific situations. The aim appears to be to adapt the practices to make them practice meet the needs of the parents. However, it was not specific practices that enabled the schools to work with parents, but the attitudes and approaches of the school in terms of reaching out to parents. These include listening to parents and adapting the practices and using different practices to meet the parents' needs that make this range of practices important.

The schools seemed to recognise a need to reach out to parents to overcome barriers. Schools described needing to provide activities that parents wanted to participate in and abandoning activities that parents choose not to participate in, providing incentives for parents to attend school events, and working with parents

in their homes and local communities. Schools suggested that they dedicated specific resources to working with parents and that it was essential to dedicate both time and money to working with parents. This suggests that the schools that participated in the project made specific efforts to adapt their practices to individual parents. The schools also demonstrated the practice of accepting that if one method of working was tried and did not work to implement a different method of working with a particular parent.

The role of special schools for BESD/SEMH in working with parents to improve family access to other services

The schools that responded to the survey described a range of ways that they worked with parents that seemed to go beyond the usual ways that schools work with parents. One of these ways was that schools can work with parents to gain access to other services. This project appears to indicate the importance of this role for special schools for children with BESD/SEMH where there is often a higher proportion of children receiving FSM and families may have the additional difficulties that can be associated with low socio-economic status. The schools helped parents to access services for their children, and for the parents themselves.

Schools can provide services which might normally be provided by social services or other agencies using different routes. The most direct route was for schools to *provide the services themselves* such as organising support groups for parents experiencing domestic violence or parenting skills courses or developing parents' own skills in cooking and how to provide healthy food. Using a less direct route schools *host other organisations* such as arranging opportunities for organisations that provide leisure activities for young people to meet parents and children, careers services for adults in the family and financial advice services. A third route for schools was to *facilitate parents' access to other organisations*. This was by signposting information for parents to access other service organisations, providing transport to meetings or medical appointments, or attending children's medical appointments with the parents: by writing letters supporting housing needs or school placement for other children at local schools; explaining letters from other organisations. Schools also described assisting

parents to complete forms to access services from other organisations; directing parents to other organisations where they could seek help, including directing parents to where they could find careers advice services or mental health services, such as support for alcohol or drug addiction. Some schools felt the necessity to provide services which were needed by the different parents at their school, the choice of route maybe influenced by the number of parents with a specific need in that school.

This indicates that schools can provide a role as a hub for guiding and assisting parents in accessing services and organisations that could support their families. If schools can undertake this role for parents, then this could possibly help parents to manage their situations and reduce the negative impact of the family circumstances, and have a positive effect on children's health, education and ability to participate in a range of activities both within home and school environments. The provision of a hub for other services may be a new role that special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs are starting to adopt. The schools may be taking on this role as providing access directly or indirectly to other services in part because of the regular contact that schools have with parents may mean they become aware of family issues more quickly and can offer directions to other organisations in a timely manner. At the same time this could apply to other special schools and could possibly be extended to mainstream schools as the schools make regular contact with parents.

Strength and limitations

Strengths

Interviews with school staff

The interviews with school staff gave a depth and breadth of detail into how schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs work with parents. The interviews were used to gain insight into the schools and a feeling for the culture of working with parents that these schools promoted. The interviews were conducted as a conversation between professionals and at times the researcher discussed the practices that were used in their own school and how effective or ineffective they had been. This seemed to prompt an openness and a supportive stance from the staff particularly the head teachers, who suggested strategies that they had used

in similar situations, which gave further insight into the ways that they had worked with parents. This sharing of practice seemed to lend authenticity to the account.

Mixed methods approach

The research was undertaken using a two-phase approach comprising an internet-based survey followed by interviews with staff and parents with six schools. This enabled an understanding of the breadth of the topic through the survey, which showed the importance that schools placed on communicating with parents and illustrated the different aims the schools had for working with parents. The subsequent interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the ways that schools approached parents and gained the views of some parents about their experiences of working with schools. This use of mixed methods was thus a possible strength of the research.

Limitations

Parent participants

Parent participants were recruited via the school staff that participated in the interviews, where the schools were acting as 'gate keepers', facilitating access to the individuals whilst also controlling which individual parents were invited to be interviewed (King and Horrocks, 2010). The schools may have chosen those parents whom they felt would best represent their point of view (King and Horrocks, 2010) and this may have limited the validity of the interview data as it was not giving a picture that was representative of all the parents at a particular school. In addition, although schools described particular practices, the researcher was not aware of the number of participants that engaged in each practice. Due to the small numbers of parents involved at each school, many of the practices that the school described were not referred to by the parents. This occurred particularly when the schools described multiple practices, whilst an individual parent may have only engaged in one or two practices. To increase the validity of the parental input more parents could be recruited for interview, either by finding a way to recruit parents through different channels or by using a case study approach focussed on fewer schools and interviewing more parents. Analysis of other sources of evidence might have been useful to corroborate the

findings, such as telephone logs, school newsletters describing events, letters about courses, and photographic evidence of practice.

Low response rate from survey

The internet-based survey had a low response rate at 11% which reduces the representativeness of the findings. This low response rate may be due to the heavy workload of school staff at the time of the survey. Schools were being asked to implement the new EHCP plans and this additional workload may have reduced the probability of staff responding to the request. Though attempts were made to contact many participants through the strategy of searching websites for contact details, the ability to make alternative contact with school times was limited by the teaching commitments of the researcher.

The survey structure was successful in obtaining core data about the schools' population, geographic location and the consent of the participant. It also enabled collection of data on basic ways of working with parents from multiple-choice questions. However, the answers to questions which required more depth provided more variable information. With an intention to increase the response rate these questions had not been made compulsory; thus, some were not answered and some just briefly. Other questions were answered, but the meanings were open to interpretation.

A further issue that Cohen et al (2018) identify can cause a low response rate is that in this type of survey there is no ability to clarify the meaning of questions and the respondents may not understand the questions. The questionnaire was piloted, as part of the design process, with staff the researcher's own school for both ease of comprehension and for grammatical soundness; it was therefore anticipated that the intended recipients would be able to access the questionnaire.

A lack of interest or an ignorance about the topic is a reason given by Cohen et al. (2018) for individuals choosing not to respond to surveys or requests for interview. This could lead to bias in the findings as it suggests that the individuals in the schools who responded may be more interested in the topic of how schools work with parents than individuals who received the email invitation in the schools

and did not respond. The anonymity of the survey means that it is not possible to follow this up.

Single interview with each participant.

Due to the constraints of a single researcher project, with a full-time teaching job only a single interview took place with each interviewee. Although some depth of detail was noted, there were missed opportunities to obtain a greater depth of understanding to how special schools for BESD/SEMH work with parents. When transcribing the interviews, there were occasions when it became obvious that there were important details that should have been followed up. Similarly, when reviewing the whole process there were themes that were uncovered in one school which had not occurred during a previous interview. If follow up interviews had been used, the opportunity to follow up these themes could have been examined to see if they were in all schools or only in the school that specifically mentioned the theme.

In retrospect it would have been beneficial to have had a follow up interview with each participant, so that after reflecting on the interviews there would be an opportunity to ask further questions, or as suggested by one school to visit their school to gain greater detail. This would, however, require additional time commitments from participants.

Interviewer relative lack of experience

The researcher had relatively little previous experience of interviewing and this might have reduced the quality and depth of the interviews, compared to a more experienced interviewer who may have gained more detailed responses from interviewees, as suggested by (Cohen et al., 2018). This may have been exacerbated using phone interviews for most of the interviews. For example, a possible issue in phone interviews is that the interviewer misses some of the nuances of the conversations that would be present in a face-to-face interview (Torrance, 2000). This may have led to less depth in the interviews or a lack of exploration of some areas. This links to the relative lack of experience of the researcher as an interviewer and the initial choice of working with a survey to gain data, resulting in less time available to focus on interviews.

Suggestions for further areas of research

Interviews with staff at a wider range of schools to explore this in more depth

The response rate from the survey was low and led to a corresponding low number of interviews with school staff, who were either self-selecting or nominated by the person who completed the survey. This could indicate that these individuals, who participated in the internet based survey and interviews, had an interest in the topic and perhaps suggested that they would respond differently to individuals who did not volunteer for the interview (Cohen et al., 2018). Further research could be conducted with a wider group of interviewees, using a different method to contact individuals, to get a broader perspective on how special schools for children aged 11-16 work with parents.

Interviews with parents who are not identified by schools.

A limitation of this project was that all the parents that participated in the interviews were identified by the participating schools. The schools acted as 'gate keepers' (King and Horrocks, 2010), meaning that they facilitated introductions to parents for interviews, however at the same time they controlled which parents were introduced to the researcher. This suggests that the schools introduced the researcher to parents with whom they had good working relationships, as these would be the parents that would be willing to participate in an interview. An unsuccessful attempt was made to contact parents through parenting groups, as described in the methodology. Further research could be undertaken to explore how a wider group of parents felt about the way that schools worked with parents. This could include finding local groups that they could attend or by focussing on a larger group from one school.

In-depth case study of one school engaging higher numbers of staff and parents

An alternative approach to dealing with the issue of the school acting as 'gate keepers' described above would be for an in-depth case study of one school to be undertaken with higher numbers of staff and parents to be involved. If a wider range of staff and parents from one school were involved this could increase the validity of the data collected. However, the data may not be representative of all schools, only of the specific school, but the depth of data would allow the reader

to evaluate the usefulness of the information in their own context. The use of a case study might enable greater understanding of the processes and time that an individual school uses to work with parents. It would also enable the collection of the views of a wider range of staff and parents at the school about how the school worked with parents, and the effectiveness of the practices. It would enable a greater understanding of the level of individuality needed and dependent on the time scale of the project allow an understanding of how practice changed over time.

Research into the role of schools assisting parents to access other service organisations

A key finding of this research project was the role of schools assisting parents to access different services. This seems to indicate that schools are to some extent providing some of the roles that would normally be delivered by social services or other agencies. Further research could be undertaken to examine the extent to which schools undertake these practices, including whether these are isolated occurrences in these particular schools, its occurrence in special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs, in all special schools and whether the practice extends to mainstream schools. Further research could explore the range of different routes that schools use to assist parents to work with different organisations and the ways that schools facilitate parents' access to these services.

Recommendations and implications for practice

Several recommendations and implications arose from this study which pertain particularly to special schools for children with BESD/SEMH needs, however these may also be relevant for special schools generally and perhaps for mainstream schools too.

The role of leadership in developing ways of working with parent

The importance of the role of head teacher or other senior staff in ensuring that staff view working with parents as an important part of their role is emphasised by Goodall (2018a). Within the study schools both parents and staff also emphasised the importance of the role of head teachers in making parents feel that they were involved. The head teachers indicated that they felt that it was

important for some parents that the head teachers made themselves visible to parents, and in contact with some parents themselves, as opposed to leaving this role to teachers. The recommendation here seems to be that head teachers need to take an active role in working with parents not just to promote it within the school but to take a participatory role where parents can see that that are valued by the head teachers.

Building relationships with parents

This study shows the importance of working with parents through activities that indicate that schools attempt to understand parents' points of view and circumstances. This suggests that schools need to devote time to building relationships with parents. However, the schools in this project provided for secondary age children, and all showed a commitment to working with parents and described a range of positive outcomes. This is contrast to the suggestion by Barlow and Humphrey (2012) that parents are less involved with schools as their children's age increases. By working with parents, schools can develop a better understanding of children and work with them to support children with specific issues and help the children to great achievements as described in the literature review.

The importance of listening to parents and adapting practices accordingly

There is much guidance regarding the expectations of schools, for example, in the School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019b) and National Curriculum guidelines (DfE, 2014b). There is also guidance regarding what students need to achieve to gain qualifications from exam board subject specifications, for example the AQA GCSE Science specification (AQA, 2016). Further, schools may believe that they understand what children need better than parents understanding what their children need.

This study has shown that the schools can focus on their parents' need and concerns. This can be directly about how to support the child. Parents in their interview stated the importance of schools listening to their concerns about their children. However more importantly schools need to listen and understand how the parents want to work with the schools. The study indicated that it is not that some parents are 'hard to reach' but that the schools would need to use different

practices that were focussed around the parents' needs as opposed to around the school's needs. The schools would then need to implement practices that would help the children to work on the issues that the parents had identified as being of concern.

Role of the school in assisting parents to work with other organisations

This study has suggested that schools can have the ability to act as a hub for parents to access other organisations that may help them in overcoming difficult circumstances. If schools understand the parents' circumstances, they can consider the best way to provide access to the relevant organisations. A recommendation of this study is that schools could consider which other organisations parents need to access, then reflect on how they assist parents to access these services either by providing the services directly themselves or by hosting other organisations to provide the services at the school or working with the parents to access organisations by providing details of where to access these services. Although provision of these services may not be a part of the traditional school role, the school needs to consider what the primary needs of the parents and whole family are so that the parents are then able to focus more on supporting the child.

For schools that provide an education for children with BESD/SEMH needs, as previously discussed there may be a higher proportion of children receiving FSM and families may have other needs. In light of this, schools may need to consider how they will resource this provision whether by dedicated staff, such as a family school liaison team/worker or by allowing time for individual pastoral/tutor staff to get to know the parents well, understand the family situation and needs and to work out how to assist the parents to access any services that they might require.

Reflections on my journey

At the start of this journey I had recently undertaken the role of SENCO at a special school for secondary age children with BESD/SEMH needs and as part of the implementation of the EHCP process I had been liaising with parents to discuss what they wanted for their children's future. These discussions showed that all the parents I spoke with were interested in their children's education and wanted to be involved. This contrasted with the way my colleagues discussed

parents, which was negative and indicated that they felt many parents were reluctant to engage with the schools. When I started this project, the expectation was that I would be collecting data that would allow me to find a series of practices that would help the staff at my school to work better with parents. I was envisaging the collection of a list of activities and practices that my school, and special schools for children with BESD/SEMH generally, could implement that could be used in different situations and to encourage parents to work with the staff.

My reflection on the usefulness of different types of research changed as the research progressed. In parallel, my ideas of how schools could work with parents changed and the approaches and attitudes that other schools used also developed and the following sections outline the changes in my thinking.

Reflections on my ideas about qualitative and quantitative data

My initial plan had been to conduct a large-scale survey of all schools matching the criterion of special schools with a categorisation of BESD, providing for secondary age pupils, to produce quantitative data. One expectation was to be able to find a list of school practices that I could take to the head teacher and say: 'These are the practices that other schools say work, can we implement these?' The survey provided limited data to answer the questions that I was trying to answer, there are several aspects as to why this was less effective than I hoped. This was due to the low response rate, discussed as above as a limitation of the project, which is considered as part of the limitations of the survey.

My impression is that from my findings I gained a more detailed understanding of how some schools worked with the parents from the interviews with staff and parents in phase two. It was not the specific activities that mattered, but the general approach and attitudes that the schools had towards working with parents. My change in thoughts about this started to take place during the data analysis phase. Initially it started as noting common practices that the schools described, however it was only as I identified key attitudes such as adaptability, an approach where if one method has not worked the schools in the study would try a different approach that I really started to understand what was emerging from the research project. I started to understand and value the importance of qualitative data to describe the ways that schools were working with parents and

that the questionnaire format used in phase one was less likely to provide the depth of detailed data to be able to describe the attitudes and approaches that the schools participating the interview described. During this process I also changed my views of what schools particularly needed to improve the way that they work with parents and this is discussed in the next section.

Reflections on my ideas of working with parents

At the start of this research project I was working at a secondary school for children with BESD/SEMH needs. As described earlier I found my own experiences of parents and working with parents initially contrasted with those of colleagues. I was seeking activities that could be implemented to improve working with parents, however as part of the analysis of the interviews my views of how schools could work with parents changed. Whilst analysing the interviews, I started to gain the understanding that there were some practices that schools arranged that parents chose not to participate in and others that they chose to engage with, and that it is for schools to try to provide experiences that parents want to participate in. The second area that I started to understand is that it is important for schools to find ways to reduce the structural barriers, such as times and location, that prevent parents attending school events. These barriers are discussed in detail in the findings section, however the important aspect was that schools need to identify what the barriers are that parents need to overcome, so that they are able to work with the parents to minimise these barriers or to find alternative ways of working that can reduce these issues.

Concluding thoughts

The aim of this research was to identify how special schools that provide for children aged 11-16 with BESD/SEMH work with parents. A great depth of information was collected through a two-stage mixed methods approach to data collection rather than using only a single survey. The research suggests that when schools take a positive approach to working with parents, to understanding their situation and to the school having the flexibility and adaptability to change their practices they can find ways to work with parents to support their children.

Appendices

Appendix 2.1 Articles from a search for special schools parents and SEBD/SEMH

Zainal, H. and Magiati, I. (2016) 'A Comparison Between Caregiver-Reported Anxiety and Other Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties in Children..', <i>Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders</i> , pp. 1–12. doi: 10.1007/s10803-016-2792-7.	Not school based
Margraf, H. and Piquart, M. (2016) 'Do adolescents with emotional and behavioral disturbances attending schools for special education have lower expectations regarding the transition to adulthood?', <i>European Journal of Psychology of Education - EJPE</i> (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.), 31(3), pp. 385–399. doi: 10.1007/s10212-015-0268-3.	Parents interviewed not about the schools working with parents
Severinsson, S. (2017) 'Documentation of education for teenagers in residential care: a network of blame and critique', <i>Pedagogy, Culture & Society</i> , 25(2), pp. 171–180. doi: 10.1080/14681366.2016.1238838.	About teenagers in a resident setting some parents views. Not about working with the parents
O'Riordan, Z. (2011) 'Living in the "real world": the experiences and support of school-leavers with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties', <i>Emotional & Behavioural</i>	Not about working with parents

Difficulties, 16(3), pp. 303–316. doi: 10.1080/13632752.2011.595097.	
Geležinienė, R., Ruškus, J. and Balčiūnas, S. (2008) 'Mokytojų Veiklų, Ugdant Emocijų Ir Elgesio Sutrikimų Turinčius Vaikus, Tipologizavimas', Special Education, (2), pp. 45–58. Available at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=35694296&site=ehost-live (Accessed: 13 May 2019).	
O, F. P. and Kinsella, W. (2018) 'Research exploring parents', teachers' and educational psychologists' perceptions of consultation in a changing Irish context', Educational Psychology in Practice, 34(3), pp. 315–328. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2018.1461612.	Parents view on education system not about how schools work with parents
Upton, P. and Eiser, C. (2006) 'School experiences after treatment for a brain tumour', Child: Care, Health & Development, 32(1), pp. 9–17. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2214.2006.00569.x.	About children's experiences of schools
Margraf, H. and Pinquart, M. (2018) 'The impact of maternal responsiveness and control on change in externalising behaviour problems: differences between regular and special schools', Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 23(1), pp. 3–14. doi: 10.1080/13632752.2017.1332027.	Study in to maternal behaviour not how schools work with parents

Farrell, P. and Polat, F. (2003) 'The long-term impact of residential provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties', <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 18(3), pp. 277–292. doi: 10.1080/0885625032000120189.	Life outcomes of children from a residential special school
Goodman, A. and Ford, T. (2008) 'Validation of the Ford score as a measure for predicting the level of emotional and behavioural problems in mainstream schools', <i>Research in Education</i> , 80(1), pp. 1–14. doi: 10.7227/RIE.80.1.	Paper is about the validity of a measurement tool

Appendix 3.1 LimeSurvey initial invitation email

Dear SENCo,

My name is Jo Day and I work as a SENCO at a St Nicholas School- a special school for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health difficulties. I am completing a Doctorate at the University of Exeter about how schools work with the families of children with SEMH difficulties. My supervisors are Dr Hazel Lawson and Professor Brahm Norwich. I hope you don't mind me contacting you. I would like to ask you to complete a short survey about how your school works with the families of young people with SEMH difficulties. In particular, the survey asks you to describe one aspect of your practice in working with families which you find/have found to be effective. The survey is quite short and totally anonymous. Even if you have very little time the only mandatory questions are tick boxes or one or two answers this would still be very helpful.

If you are interested in also participating in a short face-to-face or telephone interview with me, could you enter your contact details in the last box of the survey? These details will be removed once contact has been made.

I am also looking to talk to parents and carers who have worked with schools to support their children, and if you could help in that respect it would be appreciated and again all conversations will be anonymously reported.

In the meantime, could you please find the time to complete the survey by clicking on the link below. When I have the results from all the surveys, I will be sending a detailed summary of the results to all schools who I have contacted.

If you are not the SENCO, could you forward this to the most appropriate person?

Many thanks

Jo Day

Please click here to complete the survey:

{SURVEYURL}

If you do not want to participate in this survey and don't want to receive any more invitations, please click the following link:

{OPTOUTURL}

Appendix 3.2 LimeSurvey Questionnaire

Dear SENCO,

This survey is trying to find out what different types of programmes/initiatives/interventions are taking place in special schools for the parents/carers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health issues.

I would like to find out about any type of work your school does with families. This could be home/school diaries or report cards, family support sessions, family training, family therapy or any other programmes or practices that are you engage in to work with families.

The survey is short and allows for a brief description of one way in which you work with families, to keep the survey from being too long, although there is some room at the end to give details of other ways that you work with families.

If you would like to take part in a short interview to talk about your school's ways of working with parents please contact me via email, jed211@exeter.ac.uk or add your contact details at the end of the survey. You and your school will be anonymised in the final analysis.

Many thanks for your support in advance

Jo Day

jed211@exeter.ac.uk

There are 26 questions in this survey

Introductory sections

This section contains questions on consent.

Consent to the collection by this survey

- I understand that there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research.*
- I understand that any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications, academic conference or seminar presentations.*
- I understand that if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.*

- *I understand that all information I give will be treated as confidential, unless it indicates that a person is at risk of harm.*
- *I understand that once the data is submitted to LimeSurvey it is completely anonymized and the researcher is unable to identify any individual data, this means that once the data is submitted it will not be possible to delete data.*
- *If you agree to participate in an interview the data from this will be presented anonymously.*

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

The following questions will ask you about your school and then ask you to describe in detail an initiative that you have completed at your school to support the parents and carers of children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health issues.

1. Please identify the age range of pupils at your school: *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ ***mostly less than 5 years of age***
- ☐ ***mostly 5 to 11 years old***
- ☐ ***mostly 11 to 16 years old***
- ☐ ***mostly 5 to 16 years old***
- ☐ ***mostly post 16 years***

2. Are the pupils at your school mostly from your own Local Authority? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ ***Yes***
- ☐ ***No***

3. Please identify the setting of your school *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ ***rural***
- ☐ ***suburban***
- ☐ ***urban/city centre***

4. Please could you identify the proportion of children at your school who have BESD or SEMH. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ ***less than 10%***
- ☐ ***between 10% and 20%***
- ☐ ***between 20% and 40%***
- ☐ ***between 20% and 60%***
- ☐ ***between 60% and 80%***
- ☐ ***between 80% and 90%***
- ☐ ***greater than 90%***

Make a comment on your choice here:

5. Please describe the gender mix of your school pupils

Please choose only one of the following: *

- ☐ all boys
- ☐ all girls
- ☐ girls and boys
-

6. Please could you identify the main ways that you have worked with the parents and carers of children with SEMH to support their children's personal development and academic learning. *

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ home/school daily report card or daily diary
- ☐ activities for parents at the home e.g. reading programme or videos to watch
- ☐ family support sessions e.g. coffee mornings, drop in sessions
- ☐ parent training sessions
- ☐ family therapy
- ☐ Other

7. Please name the main practice that your school would recommend to other schools to work with the parents and carers of children with SEMH.

Please write your answer here:

8. Please describe the aims of the practice named above to work with the parents and carers of children who have SEMH.

Please write your answer here:

9. Please could you describe how this practice worked in your school. I would like to know what the practice involves, timescales, any specific requirements for location, training for staff or other details that might be useful to other schools.

Please write your answer here:

10. Could you estimate how many families were involved in the initiative?

Please write your answer here:

11. What were your reasons for choosing this particular practice with the parents and carers of children with social, emotional or mental health issues?

e.g. cost, recommendations, previously used or other.

Please write your answer here:

12 Please describe the person/people who designed the practice?

e.g. SENCo/SENCo, Head teacher, Assistant Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher, Teacher, Teaching Assistants, CAMHS, SaLT. *

Please write your answer here:

13. Please describe the person/people who delivered this practice.

e.g. Head teacher, SENCo, Teacher, Tutor, Teaching Assistant, CAMHS, SaLT.

Please write your answer here:

14. What were the timescales of the practice?

i.e. met once a week for 12 weeks or twice a month for 12 months *

Please write your answer here:

***15. What methods did you use to evaluate the success of the practice?
e.g. behaviour points or rating scales, parent, staff or student evaluations,
please include all that were used.***

Please write your answer here:

16. Please describe the success of your practice. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ ***fulfilled the aims totally***
- ☐ ***fulfilled most of the aims***
- ☐ ***fulfilled a couple of the aims but most aims were not met***
- ☐ ***did not meet any of the aims we hoped for***
- ☐ ***not applicable as the project is still in progress***

Make a comment on your choice here:

--

17. If you have repeated this particular way of working have you changed anything and why?

If you have not repeated this way of working are there any aspects, you would change if you could?

Please write your answer here:

--

18. If you have collected the views of any pupils could you describe these here.

Please write your answer here:

--

19. If you collected the views of any parents could you describe these here.

Please write your answer here:

20. If you collected the views of any staff could you describe these here.

Please write your answer here:

21. If there is anything further you would like to tell me about this initiative please add this now.

Please write your answer here:

final section of questions

Final questions

20. If you have used any other methods in the school for supporting the parents or carers of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that you have found helpful could you describe these here. If you could tell me what made them successful, that would be useful.

Please write your answer here:

21. If you have used any other methods of working with the parents of children with SEMH that you have found less useful could you tell me very briefly what they were and why they were less successful.

Please write your answer here:

Thank you very much for your help.

If you feel able, I would like to ask you to participate in a telephone interview for about 20-30 minutes to discuss the different ways that your school works with the parents of children with social, emotional and mental health issues I would appreciate this.

If you would like to participate please leave a name and telephone number or email and I will contact, you with in the next two weeks.

Jo Day

jed211@exeter.ac.uk

Please write your answer here:

Thank you for completing this survey if you could click the submit button now it will be sent to me.

Thank you for participating in the survey.

I will be aiming to publish results and will send out information to all schools who have been contacted in this survey.

Jo Day

jed211@exeter.ac.uk

Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.

Appendix 3.3 LimeSurvey follow-up email

Dear Head teacher,

I am hoping to contact the person in your school who is responsible for liaison between school and parents and carers if you are not that person pleas could you pass this email on.

I am the SENCo at special school for boys with SEMH or SEBD with an interest in how special schools like my own are working with the parents of the pupils with SEMH or SEBD. I am studying this as part of a doctorate. I'd like to find out about any ways that your school has found particularly effective in working with parents to support children in their education in the way that the 2014 SEND Code of Practice emphasis. I am interested in innovative practices that schools have developed so that this information can be spread to other schools. My plan is to create a short guide to distribute to all schools contacted in the survey.

I have a survey which will take about 20 minutes to complete If it would be possible for you to complete the survey or for you to pass this to the person in your organisation who has most knowledge about the way the school works with parents.

The survey can be accessed by the link below.

Many thanks,

Jo Day


jed211@exeter.ac.uk

Click here to do the survey: {SURVEYURL}

If you do not want to participate in this survey and don't want to receive any more invitations, please click the following link: {OPTOUTURL}

Appendix 3.4 Ethics form

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



**UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER**

Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Joanne Day

Your student no: 510022876

Return address for this certificate: 3 Hawthorn Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 4PF

Degree/Programme of Study: Education Doctorate part time (SEN)

Project Supervisor(s): Hazel Lawson and Brahm Norwich

Your email address: jed211@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07857337153

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:..........date:.....15-05-15.....

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

*Project to investigate how schools work with the parents of children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties or Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties**

*Both labels are used here as there is a recent change in SEN categorisation terminology and the term used in this study may vary according to audience.

1. Brief description of your research project:

To investigate the extent and perceived effectiveness of practices undertaken by special schools, (maintained schools, academies, free schools, and non-maintained schools) for children who have statements or education, health and care plans for social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) and how these organisations support the parents of children with SEMH

- To send a survey to the SENCOs in maintained SEMH schools in England to find out how they work with parents of children with SEMH.
- To interview parents in a small number of maintained SEMH schools (3-5) in England to find out how schools work with them to support their children
- SENCOs will be invited to participate in a follow up telephone interview.
- If contacts arise with providers of parent/school training, services or other support for parents of children with SEMH these will also be followed up via interview

The data collected will be examined to find trends of particularly effective practices.
There will be a reflection on the types of intervention that parents thought were effective and a reflection on the practices that schools perceived as effective.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Parents of children at (3-5) maintained schools for children with SEMH will be contacted to see if they would participate in an interview to discuss how schools have worked with them to support their children. A lime survey will be distributed to all SENCOs working in maintained special schools for children with SEMH in England.

SENCOs will be asked if they would like to participate in an interview.

If SENCOs or parents provide details of providers of parent/school training, services or other support for children with SEMH, these will also be followed up via interviews by phone or face to face if locality makes this possible.

No children will be contacted as part of this work.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

3. Informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both head teachers and parents. Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document.

Informed consent form for parents and providers of services attached.

Informed consent for SENCO's is part of the survey attached.

Project information sheet attached

No children will be contacted for this project

4. Anonymity and confidentiality

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

The SENCO survey will be administered via lime survey. This has a built in anonymity function, which will be used. Where SENCOs do pass on their details for inclusion in the telephone interview then these will be deleted from the survey and records held separately and securely at the researcher's home for contact for the telephone interviews

For the interviews with parents each parent will be told that they will not be identified in the research and will be given pseudonyms. Schools will be given pseudonyms in the research to reduce identification, and the area of research will only be identified as schools in England.

5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The SENCO survey will be conducted using lime survey and will be short and easy to follow. The surveys user friendliness and effectiveness at capturing data will be piloted via asking a middle leader and senior leader at my school to complete the survey and then feedback any issues on the usefulness. This will also enable a review of the data collected for any sorting issues.

The parental interviews will be piloted with staff at my own school who have children with special needs. Afterwards these staff will be asked to comment on the interview process and questions and suggested ways to improve it. The data recorded will not be part of the research project, merely to check out the review and improve the data collection process.

The parental interviews will be conducted in a place of the parent's choice, within the bounds of researcher safety (i.e. homes, schools or local café) or by telephone if this is more suitable due to distance or timing. The research will always leave details of the location of the meeting and expected return time with a close relative this information will be destroyed on the researcher's safe return.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or

It may be that any parents or carers may perceive that I am offering to find them extra support and they may be disappointed that this is only a research project and feel that this has been a waste of time. This will be explained to parents, both via the initial contact letter, the consent form and as part of the interview.

Digital voice recordings will be made on a voice recorder. These will be stored on the recorder and then transcribed on to the researchers' personal computer and backed up to the Exeter University U: Drive, where pseudonyms will be used to record/identify the files and the schools to which the parents were identified.

The researcher maintains Norton security on the personal computer. The voice recorder and the computer will be maintained securely at the researcher's home or with the researcher whilst out of the home. The researcher's computer is password protected.

A record to identify the parents and files will be maintained on the researcher's home computer.

7. Special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

The SENCO lime survey will be sent out to the users school email account and so the screen could be adjusted for their vision. There would not be expected to be any difficulty with vocabulary or comprehension for his group

For the parent group when contacting the group I will enquiry if they have any specific needs that I can assist with. The location of the interview will be at a place of their choosing.

8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

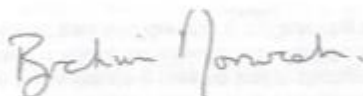
It may be an issue that a parent discloses a child protection issue during the discussion. I would contact the child protection officer of the school concerned to report the issue. If contact has been made other than via a local school then the local social services will be contacted.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: June 2015 **until:** June 2016

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):  **date:** 18-5-15



20-5-15

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference:.....D/14/15/48.....



Signed:.....
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

date:.....26.05.2015.....

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: March 2013

Appendix 3.5 Interview guide for staff interviews

(All questions to be asked with reference to the participants answers)

	Before Practice	During the Practice	After the practice
What	What were the aims of the practice before it started? What previous activities had your school offered?	Please describe the practice. What activities participants	Did the school ask for feed back on the practices
When	What was the planned length/frequency/duration of the sessions (ongoing practice or short term practice) Established or new activity	How many sessions? How long?	What feedback did you get How did you evaluate the success of the project
Why	What factors affected which parents you chose to become involved in the practice What were the aims of the practice	As the activity progressed were you able to see how the activity met the aims	Did the activity meet the stated aims?
How	How did you contact parents about the practice How did you set up the practice	Did you contact the parents during the period of the running of the practice	How would you suggest improving the activity? Have you repeated the activity
Who	What were you told about who would be running the activity	Who ran the activity?	Was feedback collected?

		How many people participants in the activity if a possible question	
Where	How did discussion about the activity take place before the activity started Was it in school out of school	Where was the practice What factors affected where the practice took place.	What would you change Did you change anything

Appendix 3.6. Interview guide for parent interviews

(All questions to be asked with reference to the participants answers)

	Before Practice	During the Practice	After the practice
What	<p>What were you told about the aims of the project before it started?</p> <p>What previous activities had this school offered? Have any previous schools offered to work with you in any way?</p> <p>What did you expect to get from the activity?</p>	<p>What happened in the sessions?</p> <p>What did you think about them did they help you?</p> <p>Did they help your child</p>	<p>Were you asked for your opinion on the activity?</p> <p>Was there any follow up work if the programme is over?</p> <p>Would you do it again</p>
When	How long before the activity started were you told about it	<p>How many sessions?</p> <p>How long?</p>	
Why	How did the school explain why you/your child were being invited to participate	As the activity progressed were you able to see how the activity met the aims	<p>Did the activity meet the stated aims?</p> <p>Did meet your own aims?</p>
How	Letter email phone call on school meeting home visit	<p>Did you discuss how the activity was progress?</p> <p>How was this conducted</p>	How would you suggest improving the activity?

Who	What were you told about who would be running the activity	Who ran the activity? How many people participants in the activity if a possible question	Was feedback collected?
Where	How did discussion about the activity take place before the activity started	Was the location of the activity one that you could get to easily. Was it accessible? (may not be relevant for all activities) Were there issues that affected your ability to attend?	How did they collect this information? Phone face-to-face letter meeting?

Appendix 3.7 Consent form that was read at all interviews to gain verbal consent

Title of Research Project: Project to investigate how schools work with the parents of children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Verbal consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

Appendix -3.8----Introduction sheet for parents



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Project to investigate how schools work with the parents of children with Social Emotional or Behavioural Difficulties

Project Overview

All parents and carers of all children face a range of challenges raising their children and can need support to help them cope with these difficulties. However for parents and carers of children with disabilities these challenges can be even more than for most parents and carers. This project will examine how schools work with the parents and carers of children with social emotional and behavioural difficulties.

In one phase interviews will be conducted with the parents and carers of children diagnosed with SEBD who are attending a maintained special school in the England. The focus of the interviews will be to find out about the support that they have received to help them with their children's needs.

What I would like to do

I would like to sit and talk with you for about an hour either by phone or in person, if it is convenient, about how the school your child attends have worked with you to support you with your child's needs. I will not share this with the school and will not be able to offer any assistance in gaining extra assistance for your child.

You have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information from the interview.

What I can't do

This is a research project so I will be unable to help your child as an individual or gain any extra resources at your child's school. However, I hope that the research I produce will help schools to support parents of children with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties.

What I plan to do with the information

The data from this project will be completely anonymised and written up as part of my doctoral thesis in such a way that no participants may be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for individuals and schools. Reports may be written for academic journals or conferences but these will also be anonymised.

All information which any participants give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations and will be kept entirely confidential. The only exception is if a child protection issue is raised in which case it will be necessary to pass on the information to the appropriate school or social services.

There is no compulsion for anyone to participate in this research project and, if you do choose to participate, you may at any stage withdraw your participation and may also request that data regarding your self be destroyed.

Details of how to contact me:

Email: jed211@exeter.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Dr Hazel Lawson h.a.lawson@exeter.ac.uk

OR

Professor Brahm Norwich B. Norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.
Revised March 2013

Appendix 3.9 Example of transcribed interview

Interview Carlotta Art therapist, Irons School

Carlotta, has a strong Italian Accent and at times the record is unclear lots of umms and ahhs

Paper copy of consent form

Conducted Waterstones (Carlotta's Choice)

Background noise small children.

Jo: Could you tell me the name of the school

Carlotta Irons school

Jo And could you tell me a bit more about it

Carlotta emotional and behavioural difficulties secondary school with boarding provisions in local and erm what else could I say it's a school for boys who have emotional what s the difficulties it's a secondary school they would be for ks3 and ks4 from 11 to 15-16 and its the moment we have 60 boys in school not all of them board and they come from not all over the place but they cover local county council and they also come from other county's not totally sure the school has taxi facilities the kids who don't board get picked up the taxi every Monday Morning and they get home by taxi and those who board will be picked up on the Monday morning and then they get home on Friday or Thursday depending on how long how many days they board

Jo That brilliant I've got a picture of the school. The point I'm really trying to find out about is how your school works with parents to support the children

Carlotta At the moment what I can think of is we have a home school liaison worker and she has regular contact with families so she rings families and also goes to their houses for home visits try dealing with problems with regards for instance attendance if the boy is not attending properly to investigate why or maybe difficulties around I think welfare its a way of supporting families since when considering they don't live so far out.

Carlotta what we used to have is a family and school work project what ever you call it so it was a weekly family group work that took place in school and it was open for six to eight families but I believe it started with four in a pilot and it worked very well and carried and that again involved a systemic family counsellor

and an art therapist and then two school staff from the mainly boarding section and they run this initially just with the parents and then children the boys later on and the parents

Jo was that later on number of weeks or during the sessions

Carlotta During the sessions the parents had an hour to begin with and they talked about how the week went and any problems that might have occurred during that week and they want to talk about with the staff and the rest of the group and then we called the boys for another maybe 45 minutes to an hour that time boys and parents were meant to do an activity together that varied could have been drawing together or could have been a game and at the end of that time the boys and the parents were asked to think about how the session went and then we had lunch together so also parents boys and staff and then the boys returned to the classroom whereas parents remained for an hour half and hour with to discuss how the morning went so it took the whole morning basically from 10 00 o'clock to one half one and that was and then throughout the week school staff may had some contact with the families involved in the project and each week the boys and the families targets home targets as well as school targets home targets could have been like tidying up your room or get up when mum calls you first thing or not swear to at home and school targets and the parents were meant to and they were given a chart and they were meant to mark the target progression of the targets day by day. And they were meant to do this for the morning for the for the afternoon and for the evening this applied for weekends mainly for those who board for the boys who didn't board it applied afternoon and evening and the boys also had the school target and equally it could've been answer properly during the lesson or pay attention to the lesson or ask for help when you need it varied these targets would have been discussed during the sessions so it wasn't just staff producing these ones

Jo How did the boys respond to those discussion

Carlotta It varied {laughs} eeerm

Jo Better question how did the parents respond did the parents

Carlotta Were the parents open

Jo mm

Carlotta I would say initially maybe could ... not they tended to say things everything's fine it's quite a big step admit when you have problems then I think as the parents developed felt more comfortable within the group familiar with the dynamic of the group and also build a network, because I know they exchange phone numbers and ring each other during the week they became more comfortable with that and they did I think they took it on board very well I remember some of the comments feeling that the parents said were around not feeling alone with that programme so when you think that knowing that other people share the same difficulties or perhaps not any more had ideas or had a view on it not alone any more or and made them feel stronger and also more hopeful and in a way also that they could they felt more empowered to deal and the children and the boys I can remember particularly one who again some boys unfortunately some boys didn't perhaps took it on board fully and these boys didn't continue for the whole programme and but the others and in particular I can think of one were given a voice a space to be heard to obviously after the activities with the parents and the children together both parents and children were able to share their own ideas together and I think that also for the boys to hear what their own parents and carers thought about their struggles with the boys behaviour

Jo Can you give me an example of that I know you're not going to give me names

Carlotta I remember a grandmother sorry my brain having a difficulty with the boy who was at home quite at times rude very rude to her and also would plan did things like scare her off like what's it called not jokes what's the word of it

Jo pranks

Carlotta yes pranks quite a lot it to her for the fun of it but she didn't think it was funny at all when she told about these they were quite dangerous at time {Sad face shaking her head}

Jo what sort of things

Carlotta Like for instance If I remember correctly once from the front door he if I remember correctly put the bucket of water as she went into the room the bucket of water fell off on her I can't quite remember it was something to I can't

quite remember how he organised the whole thing it was something to do with the bucket of water falling on her and she was taken by surprised and nearly has an heart attack no sensible and she didn't like it at all but he would find it very funny obviously and from something like this to being very rude verbally rude to her And I think this boy never really understood how grandma took experienced all of these pranks because he thought she enjoyed them as much as he did but when he heard that she didn't I don't remember he felt a bit surprised not surprised yeah as if something yeah surprised and he really made an effort to stop and he did because what hurt him the most was hearing his Nan feeling of fear around him because of his pranks {shakes head}

Jo Did this improve the home

Carlotta it did I would say it wasn't just for this family but was for other families the one who succeed. It improved the family communication and understanding of each other I don't know if it is probably related to it one father of one of these families decided to go back to work and {tails off doesn't finish the sentence}

Jo Its good

Carlotta he decided to go back to work while we doing the family group work so to my mind it partly could also have been this work more empowered

Jo that sounds amazing

Carlotta also mum the mum of this family also did think about going not back to work but doing she was a very good used to be a swimmer swimming coach and she did think about going back to that to train kids now I'm no longer in touch with this family I don't know but the only fact she start thinking about that from just I can't do anything it's a big step forward{Worried face}

Jo yeah

Carlotta yeah

Jo that sounds amazing so how many you said that you're not still using this programme now

Carlotta oh yeah no???

Jo so how long did it run for and what caused it to stop it sounds amazing ly good

Carlotta yes it was good also considering all the preparation before it was before it was we run the programme I forgot to say maybe we run coffee mornings to get to know the parents the mornings were open to pretty much all the parents then only a few would come then from the coffee morning and having a chat there was on a home it became very clear who would be the most best candidate for the programme and also the parents by the end of the coffee morning would have said if I'd like to continue or not so that was kind of the selection programme and it was a gentle way to get into the programme and I would say from that it ran 8 weeks for it was a year just over a year it had to stop it stopped mainly because of finance

Jo and did the programme keep the same format all the way through

Carlotta Let me have a think in the 8 week pilot the sessions were shorter a little bit shortened there was and also we didn't give the school targets and the family taxi for the 8 weeks it was is it bad if I say talking but

Carlotta So back to em why did it how did it run -

Jo so you had the first project

M The first one from which we had two boys and the graduated into the second erm moved into the second school family works

Jo Program

Carlotta that would be a good word

Carlotta and So they would be in the second group with the two new boys and that worked and there was another boy although attendance wasn't very good. but overall that group the second group worked well

Jo and were the two you have just spoken about the two boys the one with the grandmother that you just talked about were they from that group

Carlotta Yes that was from the second group

Carlotta And from that second group a third group was created

Jo Did any come over from the second group to the third group or was that all new participants

Carlotta Yeah I'm thinking one no two remember no the third group were a lot of new boys some of them yea h one of them was local that one didn't work very well in terms of some parents well the truth is some parents didn't attend regularly for the group to work

Jo What caused them not to attend

Carlotta Various reasons The one was to do with... well.. family not being ready having other priorities like for instance social housing being priority or mum not being in the right place that she needed help first before she could actually feel able to cope with the family work. Hence why they wouldn't attend

Jo was travel an issue

Carlotta Traveling was also an issue and they couldn't get to school and the school did actually try to meet their needs I remember even in the pilot with the school did try to meet their needs Can I say

Jo yeah

Carlotta I remember giving lifts to parents the school asked me to pick them up and someone else would drop them home. But that kind of if you think about it lets say if you have to do it for a maximum of four and eight parents it becomes very costly

Jo that's part of the issue is

Carlotta you have to bear in mind that even if they were local some families wouldn't drive or didn't have the bus transport wasn't good so there were no other way round that unless they had someone being able pick them up sometimes especially in the second group and that was the group that worked very well parents were parent I remember one parent who knew how to drive and she volunteered to pick up another parent for a time and she did that I suppose that s about empowerment and they really cared about the group and that's why that group went really well .so because with the third group each week there had been quite a few weeks where no one turned up then we the group the idea of having a group meeting at the school stopped and the new idea came out that the therapist systemic family therapist and the member of the school staff were going to families homes basically and they did that for a few weeks

Jo umm

Carlotta but that sadly came to an end in these cases because families were not ready these families they had social housing to deal first If you think about the hierarchy of need that is the first need so yes umm at the moment that all

stopped at the moment what the school offers is the home school liaison worker is the person who goes to families and calls them every week or..

Jo does she go to all families in the school or just a select group

Carlotta Its a select group those who've been identified by the needs depending on their needs I suppose the other ways that the school engages with the parents are parents evening or had an open day then we have coffee morning s for charity MacMillan I think it is remember mornings then in the past

Jo do you invite parents

Carlotta they do actually generally turn up once they once they tend to turn up then we have the teacher ring home at the end once a week often it's the teaching assistant I think to inform the school how school went

Jo What's the purpose of that call

Carlotta Well its to maintain contact with the family and to let them know how school work and how school has been for the boy and also if there is a problem the parent should tackle or should be aware of sometimes' its to do with something that didn't go very well

Jo What s the benefit of this system

Carlotta Because you leave the parent the family alone you are communicating with them about the boys needs and also you give an opportunity for the parent to let you know how things are because often boys can behave very differently form at school and from home at home and even from boarding and that's why boarding calls the families and they give their own views not their own view they tend not their own can I use view the week the morning the days

Jo Yeah view

Carlotta Can I use view

Jo Yeah

Carlotta View and I think parents do appreciate it because I also for my I am going off tangent When I ring the parents initially they think you are ringing for the bad news they appreciate actually that you have not forgotten so them they feel involved.

Jo You say its not always bad news so does that mean they like it when its good news

Carlotta yeah I think so the fact is it gives them a boost of self-confidence as well with the relationship with the child it's really important and they can also see lets say for instance the boy who is always misbehaving at home but he is achieving doing well in his reading its good for a parent that he is doing well in his reading. Because he can see his child not as a I was going to say pain but as there is goodness and it is also down to the parent I think they can own if son they own that also the parent will feel also their attitude to the boy child is better and if they feel good about their child they feel good about themselves and they will show they feel good and the child themselves will be good it's a vicious circle
Jo I'm going to double back a bit going back to school and family works what were the aims what was the purpose of doing it

Carlotta the relationship between family parents and the children with the idea that it would have an impact on the also the educational attainment and the behaviour

Jo Did you feel it worked and can you expand on that why it worked in some cases but not in others just expand on that

Carlotta in some cases it has worked some families feel a lot more together as a family and they have realised the importance of doing things together so enjoying each other's company keeping each other company if their boys are doing better in school well I don't know in terms of what

Jo IF they are doing better at school did we monitor if they are doing improved at school

Carlotta I know for a boy who I see in art therapy he has completely changed it doesn't mean he doesn't have any more problems it doesn't mean that but he I remember initially he was a toddler in terms of behaviour he would completely blank me he would not engage in any activity in fact it was more like often wondered what the purpose was of but you he couldn't express his thoughts feelings but now that has changed not only he respects me a lot more he acknowledges me engage he is able to discuss what he does he is able to say

what he thinks if there is an issue about bullying he just make noise and not say it so that is a big difference and I noticed this change has particularly cos I didn't see him during family works but I used to see him before family works and now I seeing him after family works I to my mind the family work have changed the dynamics at home and he feels more valued and loved and that was one of his original problems so I remember when he was in year 7 when he didn't have any family works and now he can express himself and it is a huge change in this boy With the other here is another boy you remember I told you about with the pranks those stopped and I have spoken to grandma beginning of this year that is after the family group and I know she confirmed they have stopped and although things can go up and down and it is a bit rocky there is more respect Grandma from the boy and another change bear with me before family works this boy never wanted ever ever one to one art therapy now he is having the reason is because now he over the summer he and not just over summer but just before the summer he had bullying difficulties with another boy in his neighbour hood

Jo the other boy was bullying him or he was bullying him

Carlotta he claimed yeah it was both alleging from this other boy when he joined this school. And the change is that now this boy after the family works now this boy felt that maybe I need some time for myself to express my frustration a to talk about the bullying and so on he has come to see me a few times we see how it goes it is meant to continue and this from a boy who never ever wanted he would not have dreamed of and again I think it is because he through the family group work he understood how important it is to think about to understand our feelings think about our feeling sand how these affect our daily lives and I remember how surprised when he found out that grandma didn't like his pranks that was life changing for him so I think the family group again has had a positive impact on the this boy from being

Right ok so I would say generally for a group of three four families it worked very well

Jo why did it work well for these families?

Carlotta these families well to start with they were interested they had a genuine interest in the project that helps they also had a stable family environment they didn't have any housing issues and they took it very seriously

and also fair enough these families they formed a network they exchanged phone numbers and they created their own group so they were ready for therapy

Jo does that group still keep in touch

Carlotta yes which is good because they are supporting each other whereas with the others.

Jo what the ones it didn't work

Carlotta the ones it didn't work I can the first things that comes to mind is parents not being in the right place at all some parents are suffering from depression not being able to provide for the kids some of them have being going through almost separation divorce that obviously doesn't help very unsettled situations problems so there were too many other problems coming a bounding and they were definitely therapy family group work was not their priority

Jo So if you were to do this again what would you say you would do

Carlotta I think what I would do is better selection assessment and preparation programme for the families involved not we have a coffee morning and then we start maybe have a few one to one meetings with the parent meeting just with the parent children before we start the family project with the children as well

Jo So is something where if the home school liaison worker can work with them sort some help the to could help with housing issues or guide them in the direction for what help they need

Carlotta yes

Jo Then that might get them into the place where school and families work can support them

Carlotta yeah

That's cool

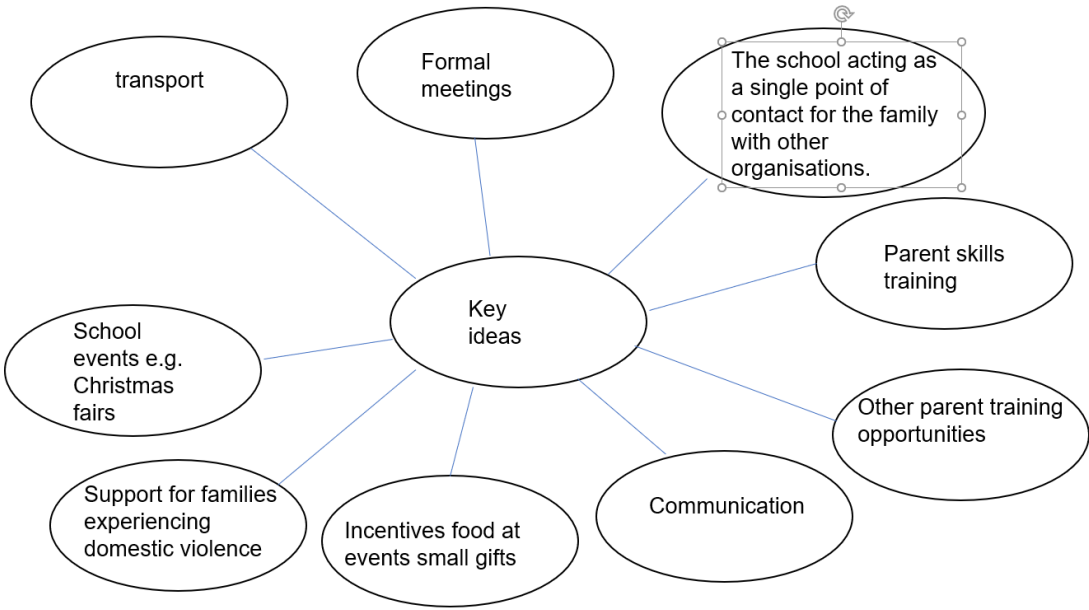
Yeah before we didn't have that figure but now we do so it was good learning experience for that we can tackle the primary needs as well

That's brilliant is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the school anything else we've missed

Carlotta No

Closing and parting comments about the weather and journey home.

Appendix 3.10 Initial Mind map generated during the analysis in phase two



Appendix 3.11 First portrait of the schools with first attempt at identifying key ideas using highlight function on word.

Initial portrait of the Irons school schools.

Using word to analyse the data was abandoned when it was clear that this did not have the flexibility needed for analysis. When trying to identify key ideas.

The activity was useful to gain a picture of the people and practices that worked in each school.

Colour key	Key idea
Yellow	Barriers to parents and schools working together
Green	Communication
Pink	Social activities
Blue	Responding to parent/carer communication
Cyan	Meetings
Brown	Family group meeting

The Irons School is a small special school for boys with SEMH, at the time of the first interviews this categorisation was SEBD located in the home counties. It has 50-70 boys between attending it 11 -16 years only

. The school is located on one site and has a unit which provides Monday to Friday boarding for a number of boys.

The initial questionnaire response was completed by the assistant head, the staff interview was with Carlotta, and subsequent interviews parent carer interviews took place over the phone with David who was the key worker for Steve who at a residential home, Jan, grandmother of Bruce and finally with Nicola who was the foster carer for Adrian. The questionnaire had been completed by unnamed member of staff who supplied Carlotta's details. .

Adrian had joined the school some time in a previous school which had been unsuccessful, his foster mother **Nicola made many comparisons to things that worked well in Irons School compared to the previous schools.** Nicola also provides respite care for a young man with Down's Syndrome some weekends. Adrian's placement at The Irons School was an out of borough placement.

The initial thing that Nicola stressed was the how important communication was and that positive communication was very important. At the previous school communication had often been of the form that there was a problem with Adrian's behaviour and that Nicola needed to come and collect him. Where the attitude at The Irons school was 'this is what's happened, but we've dealt with it perhaps you'd like to have a little word with him tonight to go through it' (Nicola), causing to feel that the school was supporting her to help Adrian. David state that if any issues arose with Steve then he was told immediately. Both Nicola and Jan stated the importance of a weekly phone call home. David said that if he missed the call then a message was always left for him. Initially these had worried Nicola, due to her experiences of communication with the previous school. 'I was always so scared of what's he done but there was none of that' (Nicola). Carlotta reflected this

'When I ring the parents initially they think you are ringing for the bad news they appreciate actually that you have not forgotten them so they feel involved.'
(Carlotta)

At The Irons School Jan felt that the phone call provided some good news every week. The personal nature of the communication was stressed by David who stated even when he spoke to the receptionist as soon as he said his name she knew who he was.

In the questionnaire the assistant head teacher described how some parents found that the open communication approach that the school had enabled parents to discuss issues that had arisen in school and how they might affect home life. By having this communication she felt that parents

'appreciated the opportunity to discuss the reasons behind their child's behaviour. felt supported and listened to' (assistant head).

At a previous school Nicola had had to leave a PEP (personal education plan) meeting to support her son whereas at the Irons Adrian attended the meetings and every thing was discussed and there was a perception of continuity provided by the school when the family had experienced quite a few different social workers, which left the feeling that 'they don't really know the young people'.

Nicola stressed the importance of her feeling that The Irons School understood the needs of her son helped her to build a stronger relationship with him. Whereas the previous school she had regularly had to collect him when issue had arisen and she 'when I've gone to get him home then I had the fall out' (Nicola) putting the emphasis on explaining why the problems had arisen.

This perception of lack of support that Nicola felt was that she stated that she had felt that the previous school had been unsuitable from the start however during placement meetings she had been assured that that school could meet or support his needs. This was emphasised when she had been at he PEP meeting and had to manage his behaviour and the assistant head asked 'How did you do that?' (Nicola). Nicola finished the sentence by telling me that all she did was 'not shouting at him.' (Nicola) perhaps

indicating the level to which relationships had broken down between Adrian and the School but also that the school had not asked Nicola how she felt that he would be best supported until they had reached crisis point.

She compared this to meetings with the Head Teacher of The Irons Schools who had not given strong reassurance but had taken the approach of we'll put him in a class and see how it works. Although initially problems arose they were dealt with at school and then a phone call was made home to discuss what had happened and how the situation had been resolved giving Nicola the chance to discuss it with Adrian. Nicola felt that at The Irons School people had understood her son, whereas her own council had made decisions without really knowing him.

David felt that the school PEP meetings helped to provide a balanced view of both Steve's academic and social development.

David described how the different activities that the school invited families to such as Christmas dinner and summer bar-b-que helped to build up rapport between carers and school staff. David described an issue where Steve's behaviour had deteriorated at school and his residential home but school boarding staff worked with both school staff and himself to help Steve to improve his behaviour, by allowing Steve to see that he would not be able to have the 'reward' of boarding at school without delivering improvements in his behaviour both at school and in his residential home unit.

Jan had been a part of the family group and described how this had worked and how she felt that they had supported her to work with grandson Bruce.

Carlotta described how sessions started with time for the parents and carers to discuss the previous week with each other and the support team, and then boys would join the group for an activity, 'collage, the string game..... we made a family crest' (Jan) and then to discuss the week. Jan described how during the activity time the boys didn't necessarily work with their own parents but with different families, giving the boys the opportunity to make relationships with other adults as well as school staff and their own parents.

After the activity the boys had an opportunity to reflect on their own week and to describe what they felt had gone well and 'one thing they weren't proud of' (Jan). Then all the parents had an opportunity to say how they would feel if they had been the parent to experience this.

'one of the boys said there was an incident where one of boys said the I ran and was brought back by the police I wasn't proud about it . Then the parents said what they thought about and then it all went round and the others said to the boy what they would feel like if it happened to them.' (Jan)

Jan felt that the way the group had developed the boy was able to discuss what he had done in a non- threatening way that was 'just conversation'(Jan) and enabled him to really open up(Jan).

Carlotta described a grandparent (who did not participate in the interviews)whose grandson enjoyed playing practical jokes on her, the example being discussed was a bucket of water on top of the door which fell and covered her in water. T

Appendix 3.12 coding structure developed in Nvivo11

Codes from Nvivo

barriers to schools working with parents
communication (examples where it has not been effective)
descriptions of where it is not working
formal meetings
lack of understanding from the people placing the children
letters
current situation
domestic violence
from child
from partner or other
finances
feeding the family
no credit on phone
transport
housing
being evicted (rent arrears)
unsuitable for family
Other issues
Illness in the family
separation divorce
weird phone calls
Don't relate to staff
examples of parents not being involved
finance
geography
conflict with events for other family members
not at the school for communication
Not at the school gate
Parents feel isolated from their peers
transport difficulties
past experiences

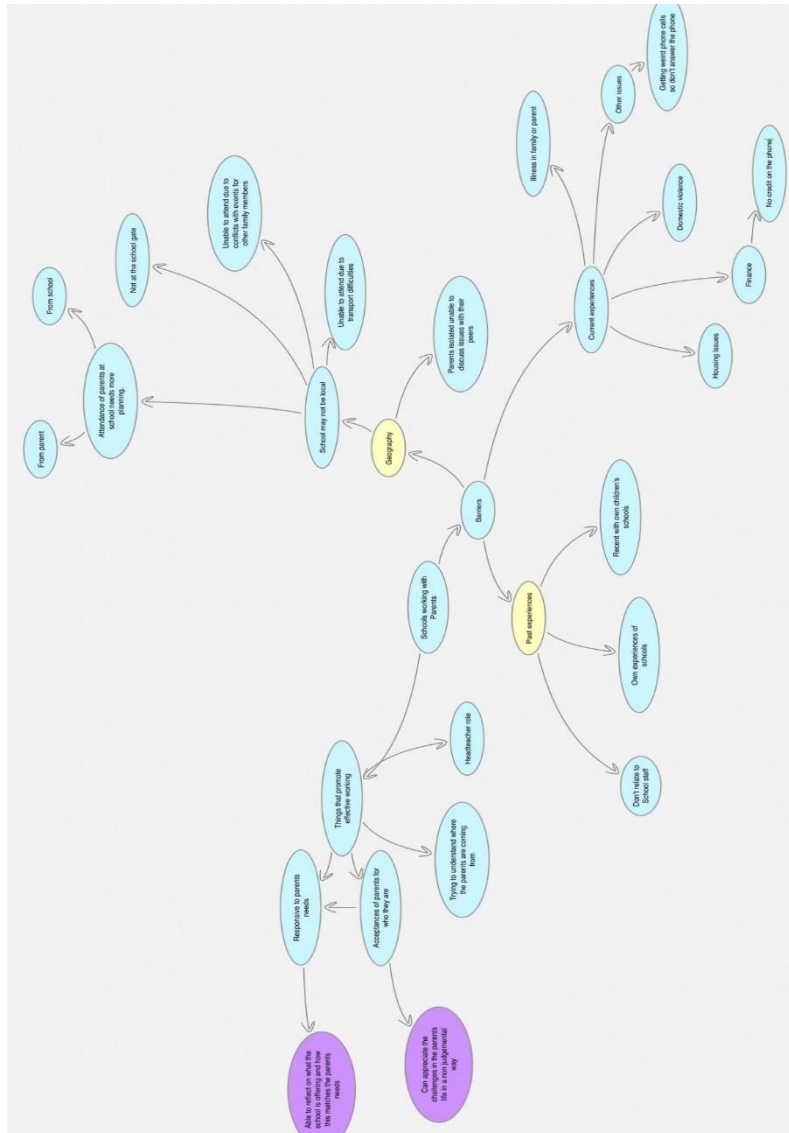
Codes from Nvivo

experiences from their children's previous school
parents own experiences from school
social expectations
Description of the school
things that haven't worked
things that promote schools and parents working together
behaviours, beliefs and underlying attitudes
acceptance of parents for who they are
accepting that the parents are not at the same place and meeting the
parent at the place where they are and not asking the parent to meet
them
meeting the parent at the place where they are
Trying to understand where the parents are coming from
flexibility
Deciding to change
head teacher role
high standards for child behaviour
modelling good behaviour for parents
positive communication with parents
relationship
responsive to parent needs
impact on the children
parent role in working together
parent attitude
parent feels school respond to child's needs
parent gives information about the child to the school
parent peer support
parent showing feeling of inadequacy
parent supporting the school
Parental confidence in the school's ability to respond to child needs
parents pride in self
pta or governor
processes
a single point of contact among other organisations

Codes from Nvivo

activities designed to upskill the parent
activities specific to developing the child's behaviour and educational achievements
activities to develop communication -relationship between the parent and child
Assessing success
communication means
difficulties with processes
events
family therapy
school counsellor
incentives
Individualised working
induction
joint parent child activities
keyworker
home school liaison worker
Home visits
External programme followed
Meetings - reviews - parents eve
parents' group
planning in advance
programmes
respite
supporting care of other children and other members of the family
transport in
work for children to complete with the family
ways to improve

Appendix 3.13 Mind map of codes showing linking of ideas in phase two



Appendix 3.14 Portrait of a school from final readthrough of interviews

Portrait of the Irons School

The Irons School is a small special school in the west of England for about 60 boys with SEMH/SEBD. The school is located on one site and has a residential unit which provides Monday to Friday boarding for about half of the boys.

The initial questionnaire response was completed by the assistant head, the staff interview was with Carlotta, and subsequent interviews parent carer interviews took place over the phone with David who was the key worker for Steve who at a residential home, Jan, grandmother of Bruce and finally with Nicola who was the

foster carer for Adrian. The questionnaire had been completed by unnamed member of staff who supplied Carlotta's details.

Adrian had joined the school some time in a previous school which had been unsuccessful, his foster mother Nicola made many comparisons to things that worked well in Irons School compared to the previous schools. Nicola also provides respite care for a young man with Down's Syndrome some weekends. Adrian's placement at The Irons School was an out of borough placement.

Factors that promote schools and families working together.

Activities

Family group sessions

For a couple of years, the school had run weekly 'family group sessions' where the parents or carers had the opportunity to discuss issues, and to spend time working with their sons to build relationships or develop strategies to improve behaviour.

Carlotta described how sessions started with time for the parents and carers to discuss the previous week with each other and the support team. Then boys would join the group for an activity, 'collage, the string game.... we made a family crest' (Jan) the boys didn't necessarily work with their own parents but with different families.

After the activity the boys had an opportunity to reflect on their own week and to describe what they felt had gone well and 'one thing they weren't proud of' (Jan). Then all the parents had an opportunity to say how they would feel if they had been the parent to experience this.

'one of the boys said there was an incident where one of boys said the I ran and was brought back by the police I wasn't proud about it. Then the parents said what they thought about and then it all went around, and the others said to the boy what they would feel like if it happened to them.' (Jan)

Carlotta described a grandparent whose grandson enjoyed playing practical jokes on her, the grandmother found these situations uncomfortable and 'scary' Carlotta. The family group discussion 'improved the family communication and understanding of each other' (Carlotta) and the pranks stopped.

Although the first and second groups at the school were perceived as successful the third group did not complete the programme.

'We changed from holding the sessions in School to meeting with parents at home because getting parents to attend was the greatest barrier.' (questionnaire) Carlotta's perception was that the initial groups had worked well because the families were in the 'right place' to engage with the support group but that the third group had other 'issues' housing, transport. Parents having their own issues which needed to be resolved before they would be in the 'right place' to access the support of the family group. After this the family group finished in part due to the cost of using consultant to run this group, Carlotta described how the school decided to use the resources to provide an inhouse School Link Worker to work with parents. Carlotta felt that better selection of the parents and assessment of their readiness to access the course would improve the uptake and effectiveness of the course, whilst offering other means to work with parents who were not ready to access the course.

Communication

David state that if any issues arose with Steve then he was told immediately. Both Nicola and Jan stated the importance of a weekly phone call home. David said that if he missed the call then a message was always left for him and followed up either by phone or email. At the Irons School Jan felt that the phone call provided some good news every week. The School aims to contact every parent by phone, text or email every week (Carlotta), the regular contact also gives the parent the opportunity to feedback to the school about their son.

Meetings

The school also conducted Annual Review meetings and parent's evenings and had tried open days (Carlotta). David felt that the PEP meetings were useful to give an overview of the child' social and educational progress.

Events

The school invite families to such as Christmas dinner and summer bar-b-ques (David) felt that this helped to build up rapport between carers and school staff. The school hold occasional coffee mornings to which parents are invited (Carlotta);

Transport for parents

During the family group meetings staff had provided transport for some parents, (Carlotta) as a good will gesture but for later groups this had become more difficult as parents lived at greater distances from the school and in different directions.

Flexibility

Throughout the interview with Carlotta it was evident that whenever a particular barrier to effective working had occurred the school had sought a way to resolve this.

Home School link worker

The Home School link worker assisted some families to gain disability allowances and worked on helping parents deal with housing issues when families were threatened with evictions, either through support with completing paper work or through providing evidence of the difficulties that would be caused to the child's education if the family were relocated. The Home School link worker also did home visits to the parents of children whose attendance was not good. (Carlotta)

Developing relationships.

Role of the head teacher

Nicola felt that the Head Teacher at the Irons school had been realistic in his approach and given her son time at the school to see whether the school would be able to accommodate his behaviour. She perceived this as giving her son a chance to succeed in the school compared to previous experiences.

Parent to Parent support

Jan, attended the family group and felt that the way the group had developed enabled her to discuss issues that had arisen openly with others in the same situation. She described how it had given her the opportunity to talk and they had been 'interested in me'(Jan) and not just her grandson. This helped her to feel confident expressing her concerns to her grandson who she had learnt to fear. The relationships within the other parents continued beyond the family group and continued with both her self and the other parents providing support to each other and to the boys involved.

Some parents had transport difficulties attending the family group sessions, and the earliest group parents supported each by providing transport to the sessions.

(Carlotta) This developed to the extent that some of the families became a little network with Jan saying she regularly met with one of the families from the group and it was good to feel you weren't the only one dealing with these issues.

Communications

Nicola stressed repeatedly throughout the interview, how important it was that communication was positive. The attitude at The Irons school was 'this is what's happened, but we've dealt with it perhaps you'd like to have a little word with him tonight to go through it' (Nicola). There were also regular calls to stress when her son had made positive achievements.

'When I ring the parents initially they think you are ringing for the bad news they appreciate actually that you have not forgotten them, so they feel involved.' (Carlotta)

Nicola stressed the importance of her feeling that The Irons School understood the needs of her son and how this was communicated to her helped build a stronger family relationship.

The personal nature of the communication was stressed by David.

'I don't feel shut out. Very much a part of it, I know that the staff are under pressure and they still build relationships outside of school and that's the truth don't feel like your just talking to a member of staff you know people' (David)

Responsive to parental need

David described an issue how the school worked with him to reinforce the need for the boy at his residential home to improve his behaviour at school and home by making a big reward conditional on this improved behaviour.

Barriers to schools working parents

Transport

Carlotta expressed how some of the parent's had struggled to attend the family group meetings due to lack of transport. Although this was mitigated in the initial groups, for later groups this was one factor which contributed to non-attendance as the family lived some distance from the school and the time and cost to travel to school for these sessions became prohibitive.

Parents previous experience of schools

Nicola had been concerned about the son's previous school prior to his starting there, but she felt that local authority officials had dismissed her concerns stating that this previous school 'could meet his needs' (Nicola) even though Nicola's perception was that the council officials did not understand her son's needs. However, the placement had not been successful and regular phone calls from her son's previous school for Nicola to collect her son when staff were unable to cope meant that when staff called from the Irons school she was worried about what they would say during phone calls. When her son arrived, she was very sceptical that the Irons school would be able to meet his needs due to her experience of the previous school.

Parents current situation

Some parents had found it difficult to attend the family group and other meetings due to the distance to travel and the time this would take prevented them attending the family group.

One parent had difficulties with social housing and her thoughts and priorities were on resolving these issues and she struggled to access the family group. Another parent needed guidance to work on their own mental health needs prior to being ready to work on the family group.

Nicola described how a friend of hers with a child with similar needs was exhausted due to lack of respite getting no sleep from caring for her child and found it difficult to engage with official organisations as she felt that she had been let down when she had asked for help.

Single point of contact.

Carlotta described how the school had worked with parents to organize CAMHS appointments.

Nicola had the perception that during Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings (for a looked after child) the school were supporting her to explain her son's needs to the social worker. This occurred because continuity was provided by the school whilst the family had experienced quite a few different social workers in a couple of years, which left Nicola the feeling that the social workers 'don't really know the young people' yet are making decisions for them.

Appendix 4.1 analysis of the results from the internet-based survey looking for patterns linking type of school to means of working with parent

Analysis of the impact of Location, Gender and school age range on how schools work with parents.

A consideration was whether different types of schools, by gender mix (to consider whether all boys schools would operate differently schools that have boys and girls), location would affect the way that the schools would chose to work with the

Location	Number using 1-2 methods to work with parents	Number using 3 -5 methods to work with parents	Total
Rural n = 5 ²¹	2	3	5
Suburban n =10	7	3	10
urban n= 8	3	5	8
Total	12	11	23

Number of Different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by school location

Table 4.6 shows that in this survey slightly higher numbers of rural schools and urban/city centre schools tend to use 3-5 methods of working with

²¹ N is the number of schools with the pupils of that gender. As schools were able to tick that they used more than one method to work with the children. The total number of methods exceeds the number of schools.

parents, compared to those only using one or two methods to work with parents. Seven suburban schools used only

There could be several reasons for this disparity. The question included a list of different methods of working with parents and it may be that there are other methods that suburban and urban schools use that rural schools do not use, for example, working directly face-to-face with parents due to the regularity with which parents are able to attend schools: ‘school gate’ type, manner, or telephone calls. If this is the situation it could in part be picked up by the question on the main way that schools worked with the parents or the insufficient number of responses to make a comparison.

Locati on	Number using daily report card	Number using activities for parents at home	coffee mornings	Number using parent training sessions	Number using family therapy	other	total
Rural (n= 5)	5	2	4	4	2	1	18
Suburb an (n=10)	7	2	8	4	1	6	28
urban/c ity centre (n=8)	7	1	8	3	2	3	24
totals	19	5	20	11	5	10	70

Different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by school identified location.²²

²² This question was a multiple-choice style question and the total number of times a method could be used cannot be greater than the number of respondents, however each respondent was allowed to identify multiple methods of working with parents and therefore the overall total number of methods is greater than the number of respondents

Table 4.7 shows that the most common method of working with parents in the five rural schools was a daily report card. The second most commonly used method at rural schools also coffee morning as and 80% used coffee mornings and parent training sessions.

One notable differentiating factor is that a greater proportion schools in rural areas use parent training and activities for parents at home than urban and suburban schools. It is not clear why this is from the survey and may be an anomaly due to the small sample size.

Gender Mix of schools

I wanted to consider whether the gender mix of the schools would make a difference to way that the schools worked with parents. A limitation to this is that no all girls' schools responded to the survey. Ten schools that responded to the survey were all boys' schools and thirteen schools provided for a mix of boys and girls.

The results, in table 4.9, show that schools used a wide range of different methods to work with parents. 30% of all boys schools (3 out of 10) used four or more methods to work with parents compared to just under 8% (1 out of 13) of schools with boys and girls using four or more different methods of working with parents. Conversely 8 out of 13 (62%) schools with a mix of girls and boys used two or less methods to work with parents compared with only 4 out of 10 (40%) of all boys schools. This seems an area for further research.

Gender of pupils	Number of schools using 1 - 2 methods to work with parents	Number of schools using 3 -5 methods to work with parents	Total
all boys (n=10)	4	6	10
girls and boys (n=13)	9	4	13
total	13	10	23

Number of different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by gender mix of school.²³

In all areas as a percentage of the group more all boys schools used a particular method than schools containing a mix of boys and girls. This is of a particular note for the use of family therapy which is used in more all boys schools than schools containing boys and girls. Similarly, the use of activities for parents at home is more common in all boy's schools than schools containing boys and girls. The use of a Daily Report card took place in all of the boys schools but only 69.23% of schools for boys and girls. Due to the very small numbers involved considerable caution must be given to these results and therefore this section has been moved to the appendices.

²³ This question was a multiple-choice style question and the total number of times a method could be used cannot be greater than the number of respondents, however each respondent was allowed to identify multiple methods of working with parents and therefore the overall total number of methods is greater than the number of respondents.

Gender of pupils	Number using daily report card	Number using activities for parents at home	coffee mornings	Number using parent training sessions	Number using family therapy	Other	total
all boys (n= 10) ²⁴	10	3	9	5	4	4	35
girls and boys(n=13)	9	2	11	6	1	6	35
Total	19	5	20	11	5	10	70

Number of schools using each method of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by gender mix of school.²⁵

By student age range of the school

²⁴ N is the number of schools with the pupils of that gender. As schools were able to tick that they used more than one method to work with the children. The total number of methods exceeds the number of schools.

²⁵ This question was a multiple-choice style question and the total number of times a method could be used cannot be greater than the number of respondents, however each respondent was allowed to identify multiple methods of working with parents and therefore the overall total number of methods is greater than the number of respondents.

Age Range	Number using 1-2 methods to work with parents	Number using 3 -5 methods to work with parents	total
mostly 5-16 years (n=8)	2	6	8
mostly 11-16 years (n=15)	6	9	15
total	8	15	23

Number of different methods of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by age range of school.

A higher percentage of schools with the wider age range (pupils aged between 5 and 16 years) indicated that they used more methods to work with parents, than schools with pupils in the 11 to 16 age range. This may be because there are a wide range of initiatives targeted at younger pupils with behavioural needs and that where a school is using these methods for the parents of younger pupils, they are able to use the methods with parents of older pupils as the practices are in situ. A second reason could be that the schools are describing practices which are only used with the parents of primary age pupils and not with secondary age pupils, this could be that it was not clear in the introduction that it was work with the parents of pupils in of secondary age that was of interest.

Methods that schools used by age range

Age range	Number of schools using daily report card	Number of schools using activities for parents at home	Number of schools using coffee mornings	Number of schools using parent training sessions	Number of schools using family therapy	Other	total
mostly 5-16 years (n=8)	7	3	6	5	3	5	29
mostly 11-16 years (n=15)	12	2	14	6	2	5	41
total	19	5	20	11	5	10	70

Number of school using each method of working with parents of children with BESD or SEMH when analysed by age range of school.²⁶

The use of coffee mornings and daily report cards was high in both age ranges of schools. Schools that had included pupils in the lower age range were more likely to use parent training sessions, family therapy and activities for parents to use at home. These are activities which are more resource intensive and likely to require higher levels of financial input.

²⁶ This question was a multiple-choice style question and the total number of times a method could be used cannot be greater than the number of respondents, however each respondent was allowed to identify multiple methods of working with parents and therefore the overall total number of methods is greater than the number of respondents.

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